

QUIETUS



A ROLEPLAYING GAME OF MELANCHOLY HORROR

OLI JEFFERY

Q U I E T U S

A graphic of red blood splatters and droplets, concentrated around the letter 'S' in the title 'QUIETUS'.

A ROLEPLAYING GAME OF MELANCHOLY HORROR

OLI JEFFERY

Game Design, Writing, & Layout

Oli Jeffery

Illustrations

Kasha Mika

Cover art

Thuy Tran

Editing

Lauren McManamon

Introduction and Filmography

Sarah Dobbs

Thirteen Tragedies

Alex Abou Karam, Becky Annison, Aura Belle, Misha Bushyager, Josh Fox, Hayley Gordon, Grant Howitt, Oli Jeffery, Brandon Leon-Gambetta, Lauren McManamon, Kira Magrann, Jason Morningstar, and Nell Raban

Playtesters

Mathias Belger, Kate Bullock, Angel “Hijos del Rol” Garcia, Tomer Gurantz, Bethany Harvey, Will Hobson, Tyler Lominack, Jenny Lord, Lauren McManamon, Ryan McNeil, Donogh McCarthy, Dan Marks, Katy Morgan, David Morrison, Ferrel Riley, Dylan Ross, Paul “Staxx” Spragett, Jeff Stormer, and Sabine V.



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Kasha

Horror is for everyone, and we wanted to reflect that in this book. To all the horror fans who don't often see themselves reflected in this type of media, this is for you. Big thanks to Oli for the killer opportunity.

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Introduction 6

How to Play Quietus 14

The Barest Bones 14

A game of melancholy horror 14

Media touchstones 14

How many people is this game for? 14

How long does it take to play? 14

Dice 14

The Conversation 15

The Fiction 15

The Conversation and the Fiction 15

Scores 16

Anxiety 16

Hope 17

Dread 17

The dice pool 19

After a roll 19

Increasing the chance of success 19

Tense rolls 21

Desperate rolls 21

Results per tension level 21

Scars 22

Revealing Scars 22

Safety Tools 30

Introduction to safety tools 30

Why do we need safety tools? 30

Everyone is responsible for safe play 31

Are the authors of this game just SJW snowflakes? 31

Minimum Suggested Safety Tools 31

CATS 31

Lines and veils 32

The X-card 32

Checking in 33

Open Door Policy 33

Characters, Horrors & Tragedies 36

Character & Scenario Creation 36

Creating the horror 37

Random tragedies 39

How to Run Quietus 46

The GM's responsibilities 46

Anatomy of a Session 49

Act I: Character & scenario creation 50

Act II: Opening scene 50

Act III: The climax 51

Act III: Epilogues 52

Decompress 52

Agenda 53

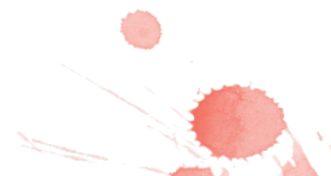
Principles 54

Interpreting dice rolls 58

Hope 58

Despair 59

Dread 59



<i>Thirteen Tragedies</i>	62
<i>How to use these scenarios</i>	62
<i>A Knock at the Door</i>	63
<i>A Wrecking</i>	65
<i>Couples' Therapy</i>	67
<i>The Fruit of Our Labour</i>	70
<i>Hallways & Exits</i>	72
<i>The Haunting of Hammond Hall</i>	74
<i>HERITAGE</i>	76
<i>Holes</i>	78
<i>Might Delete Later</i>	80
<i>Primum Non Nocere</i>	82
<i>The Putnam</i>	84
<i>Testament</i>	86
<i>Ties That Bind</i>	88
 <i>Filmography</i>	 90
 <i>Kickstarter Backers</i>	 95

IN A SENSE, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS HEALING...
OUR BODIES ARE MERE CATALOGS OF WOUNDS:
IMPERFECTLY LOCKED DOORS QUIETLY WAITING,
SOONER OR LATER, TO SPRING BACK OPEN.
INFINITE EXCHANGE, [GEOFF MANAUGH





INTRODUCTION

IT'S THE SADNESS THAT GETS YOU

It starts in the middle of the night – the crying. More like weeping, really, a heart-rending noise of utter despair that sounds like maybe it's coming from downstairs, but there's no-one there. Could the sound be carrying from somewhere else? The house is high up on a cliff, so maybe it's coming from the village, or from a secret cave somewhere on the hillside. Or maybe it's something in the pipes?

Of course, none of those desperately strained-for logical explanations turns out to be true. It's a ghost. And the main characteristic of the haunting in *The Uninvited* (1944) is that it's sad. In a kind of supernatural take on Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*: brother and sister Rick and Pamela Fitzgerald buy themselves a beautiful house on the Cornish coast, only to discover that there's a reason it was sold so cheaply. Yet while they are frightened to think there's something otherworldly sharing their home, the ghost doesn't really do anything threatening.

Instead, she cries at night, and the siblings find themselves overcome with a kind of melancholy hopelessness in one of the rooms.

Only by unravelling the mystery of the ghost's identity are they able to shake the sadness. Though *The Uninvited* is packed with witty dialogue, some screwball-style comedy, and a happy ending, somehow it's the sadness that sticks.

The Inevitability of Death

To be classified as a horror movie, a film pretty much has to be scary. But while a series of well-executed jump scares might be enough to give audiences nightmares, horror movies that lean into sadness can make us lie awake all night instead. Once the adrenaline's worn off, you can tell yourself that there isn't really a monster under your bed. But you can't escape the knowledge that death's coming for you. And for all of us.

The inevitability of death is pretty much the thesis of *Carnival Of Souls* (1962), Herk Harvey's unsettling masterpiece, in which organ player Mary (Candace Hilligoss) crawls from the wreckage of her friend's car and attempts to get over the tragedy by moving away. But her music turns sour, there's a creepy white-

faced man following her, and something's drawing her inexorably towards the abandoned pavilion out on the edge of town...

From a modern perspective, the ending of *Carnival Of Souls* hardly feels like a twist – it's been done too many times now. But knowing what's coming can't dampen the film's deeply eerie atmosphere. Mary can't get away from the accident; no matter where she goes, the spectre of death follows her. You know she's not going to escape, hasn't escaped, never could have escaped.

As Mary's desperation grows, the film grows ever stranger and woozier. It's all just so unfair – if only she hadn't gotten in the car that day! If only her friend had resisted the urge to get into a race with the obnoxious frat boys in the other car! If only they hadn't been about to drive over that bridge...

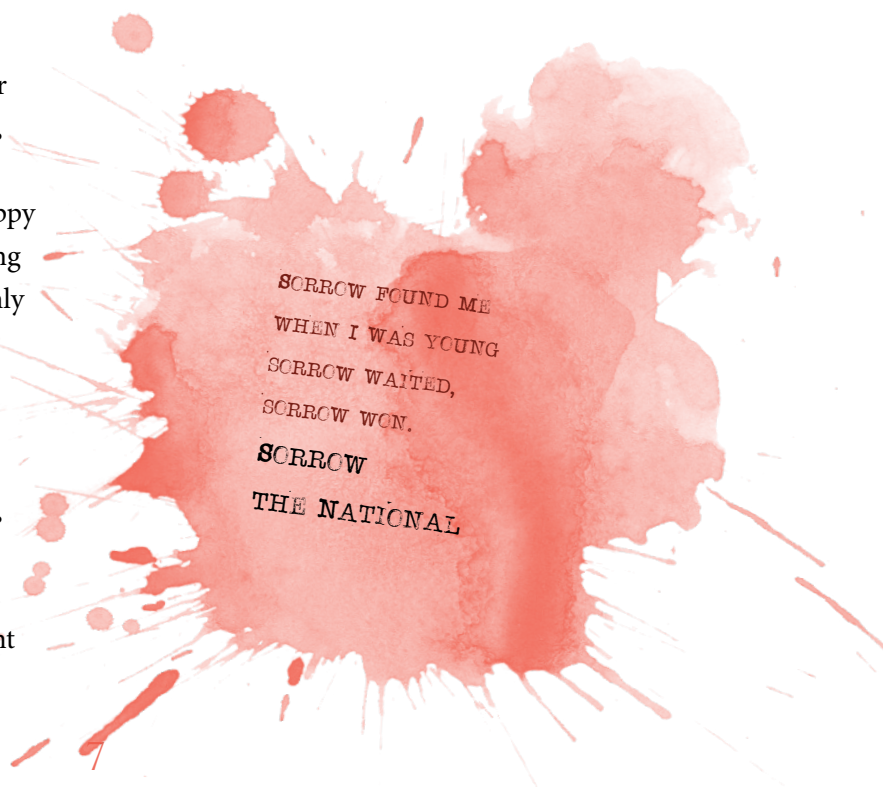
It's hard not to sympathise with poor Mary, with her pushy neighbour and touchy boss, her dead friends, and her bottomless depression. In a way, you could almost interpret the film's demented ending as a happy one, as she finally accepts what we've known all along and embraces death. It's cold comfort, but it's the only one available.

No seriously, it's Inevitable

There's a similar vibe in 2000s franchise *Final Destination*. It generally showcases lightweight, fun, silly horrors where Death – with a capital D here, definitely – tracks down a group of survivors who manage to wiggle their way out of a massive accident thanks to someone's last minute premonition.

However, there's also a weirdly dark vein of pure nihilism running through each and every one of them.

Final Destination 3 (2006) is the instalment that most successfully taps into that feeling. Wendy (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) loses her boyfriend in a rollercoaster crash that she narrowly escapes. The event haunts her almost as insistently as the feeling that Death hasn't let her off the hook yet. As audiences, though, we know there's no point in asking 'what if'. For all the movie's convoluted Rube Goldberg death scenes, the message is clear: you can't cheat Death. Outside the cinema, sure, we know Death isn't an intelligent force grumpily chasing us down, but we also know that message is true.



Actually, reality might even be worse than the movies, because there is no grand design to our lives. We're going to die, whether it's in a car crash or an elaborate Mousetrap-style accident involving reheated spaghetti. Tony Todd might not show up to get us, but no matter how clever we think we're being, we can't win this game.

Sadness is Scary

Sadness and horror aren't always two separate entities, either: sometimes, sadness itself is the horror. Sometimes, in horror movies, sadness kills.

Take Robert Wise's *The Haunting (1963)*, an adaptation of Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting Of Hill House*. Here, a paranormal investigator brings a group of people to stay in the notoriously haunted Hill House, hoping to record scientific proof of the supernatural. One of the party, Nell (Julie Harris), has spent most of her life caring for her recently deceased invalid mother. Nell's also sensitive to the supernatural. Soon, whatever's in the house sets its sights on her, holding her hand in the dark and writing messages to her on the walls.

The story ends with Nell's death, as she drives her car into a tree on the house's boundary. Was she killed by a ghost (or by the malevolent house itself)? Or did her sadness become too much to bear, driving her to suicide? Either way, it's clear that her depressive nature made her vulnerable to whatever walked in that house, in a way that her less melancholy companions weren't.

We can't talk about *The Haunting* without talking about director Mike Flanagan, who recently reimagined the story for Netflix (as *The Haunting Of Hill House*). In his version, Nell (Victoria Pedretti) lived in the house with her siblings Luke (Oliver Jackson-Cohen), Steven (Michiel Huisman), Theodora (Kate Siegel), and Shirley (Elizabeth Reaser), plus their parents Olivia (Carla Gugino) and Hugh Crain (Henry Thomas). Rather than being haunted by unseen forces in the dark, she's haunted by the vision of a woman with a broken neck.

Throughout Nell's life, the Bent Neck Lady appears to her as a kind of portent, foreshadowing something terrible. And like the Nell of the book, she can't resist the call of the house. Hill House wants her to die so she can stay there forever, and she's powerless to resist its siren call.

If you can ignore the bizarre final episode, where we learn the Hill House's sinister machinations are not true in time for a tonally jarring happy ending, Nell's story is the most tragic of all the Crain siblings (though, actually? Still not as heartbreakingly awful as Jackson's Nell, or Wise's).

Dragging You Down

Mike Flanagan has form with the sad horror subgenre, too. His first movie, *Absentia (2011)*, is about a woman declaring her husband dead in absentia, only to discover the true – monstrous – cause of his disappearance; his second, *Oculus (2013)* follows two siblings who return to the house where their parents died in an attempt to prove that they were the victims

of a supernatural force. Perhaps the most upsetting film of his oeuvre to date, though, is *Ouija: Origin Of Evil* (2016).

Yes, it's a follow-up to the much-maligned *Ouija* (2014). And yes, Hasbro (in part) produced it - which makes it, in some ways, the worst advert for a board game ever made. But it's devastating. It's the kind of film that's so upsetting, you want to stop watching it halfway through, as if somehow that'll stop bad things happening to its characters - but at the same time, you can't stop, because you need to know what's going to happen.

Set in the late 1960s, the film follows young widow Alice Zander (Elizabeth Reader) and her two daughters, Lina (Annalise Basso) and Doris (Lulu Wilson) as they struggle to make a living through faking séances. Alice has a gentle, comforting manner. Her clients trust her and believe her when she tells them their loved ones are in a better place. She's scamming them, but, well, in a nice way. Her clients go away happier, more able to move on with their lives. But in the meantime, her family struggles to move on from the death of the dad, Roger. So when Ouija boards go on the market, Lina brings one home for Alice to try. Although Alice intends to use it as just another prop, she learns the Ouija board works without any of her usual tricks - magnets, fans, hidden accomplices rattling the furniture.

Unfortunately, while it 'works', it's not connecting the Zanders to their dearly departed. They're chatting with

a demon, and it's got its eye on little Doris. Turns out there are secrets in the walls of their family home, and they're not the kind you'd ever want to discover. You don't need to have seen *Ouija* to understand *Ouija: Origin Of Evil*. But if you have, you'll already know there won't be a happy ending. Doris's sadness over the loss of her dad opens her up to unimaginable evils, revealing layer upon layer of suffering, and there's just no getting away from it. And Flanagan spends so much time setting up his characters that it really hurts to watch the horror unfold.

You know that scene in the movie *The Never Ending Story* (1984) where Atreyu's horse Artax is drowning in the Swamp of Sadness? That's kind of what it feels like to delve into Mike Flanagan's filmography. Only *Hush* (2016) and *Gerald's Game* (2017) aren't completely crushing, and even that's relative.



The Real Monster is Your Untreated Depression

Like most things, horror goes in cycles. At the turn of the century, J-horror – with its vengeful, soggy ghosts – was all the rage, with remakes of *Ring* (1999), *Pulse* (2001), *Ju-On: The Grudge* (2002), *Dark Water* (2002), *One Missed Call* (2003) and more hitting western cinemas. Next came the torture porn wave, spearheaded by *Saw* (2004) and *Hostel* (2005) and bolstered by the New French Extremity wave of brutal nasties (*À l'intérieur* (2007), *Frontier(s)* (2007), *Martyrs* (2008)). Next, the chillennials – spookfests like *Paranormal Activity* (2007), *Insidious* (2010), and *The Conjuring* (2013), movies that wanted to make you jump and keep you on edge for weeks afterwards. That wave is still holding on, just about, with more *Conjuring-verse* spinoffs on the way. But it also feels like something else is emerging, and – surprise! – it's all about melancholy desperation.

Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook* (2014) is one of the first to define this new wave. Like *Ouija: Origin Of Evil*, it's about a young widow struggling to bring up her child alone, but that's about where the similarities end. Unlike the sweet Zander kids, Samuel (Noah Wiseman) is a difficult, stressful child, and his mum Amelia (Essie Davis) is barely holding it together. And then one day a creepy children's book about the Babadook arrives on their doorstep, and everything gets much harder to deal with.

Like *The Haunting's* Nell, Amelia is struggling even before anything remotely supernatural gets involved. For her, too, the problem is internal – her grief, combined with general depression, leads her to imagine monsters, to see her own child as a source of torture. She's self-destructive, but also violent towards her child: the real monster is mental illness.

The recent remake of *Pet Sematary* (2019) also trades on the insanity of grief, and while it's not entirely effective, it does have one moment of pure, undiluted sad-horror. You probably know the story by now: a family moves to new house with a mysterious 'pet sematary' on the property, which an elderly neighbour reveals is the gateway to an ancient Indian burial ground that can revive anything buried in it – except, they come back wrong.

The movie's one transcendent scene comes as mum Rachel (Amy Seimet), who'd gone to stay with her parents following the death of her daughter Ellie (Jeté Laurence), is called back to the family home by her husband Louis (Jason Clarke). On arrival, she's greeted by a resurrected Ellie, still caked in grave dirt. Ellie wraps her undead arms around Rachel as a manic Louis tries to explain that everything's okay now, she's back. Seimet's performance sells the bone-deep horror of the moment: her revulsion as she struggles to bring herself to embrace the thing that's not her daughter, her fear as she tries to understand how her husband could think he'd made things better, and her impending suffocation under an absolute tsunami of renewed grief. Maybe death is terrifying, but also, sometimes dead is better.

The Horror Beyond the Horror

There's one more movie we must talk about here, and it might be the ultimate example of how sadness and horror can intertwine, emphasising one another. Ari Aster's *Hereditary* (2018) starts with a funeral and gets more upsetting from there.

Without spoiling too much, at the end of the movie's first act, Peter (Alex Wolff) sits completely motionless for a seemingly endless shot that's itchy difficult to watch. He knows, and we know, that something unimaginably horrible has just happened – something he can't undo, something that's sort of but not really his fault, and something that's going to haunt him for the rest of his life. The something is deeply, wrenchingly tragic as well as gruesome, and the combination is almost paralysing.

That there's something supernatural orchestrating the many and varied tragedies of this movie again almost comes as a relief, because if there's a plan, there's a reason – maybe not a good one, definitely not a good one in this case. But tragedy that has a purpose feels a little bit easier to accommodate than random suffering. Not that it's easy, even just to watch.

Speaking of watching, though, at this point we must ask ourselves why we want to watch movies like this? What is it about this moment in time that means we need our entertainment to be ever more frightening, ever more heart-rending? Why do we make ourselves sad for the suffering of imaginary people when there's so much awfulness in the real world?

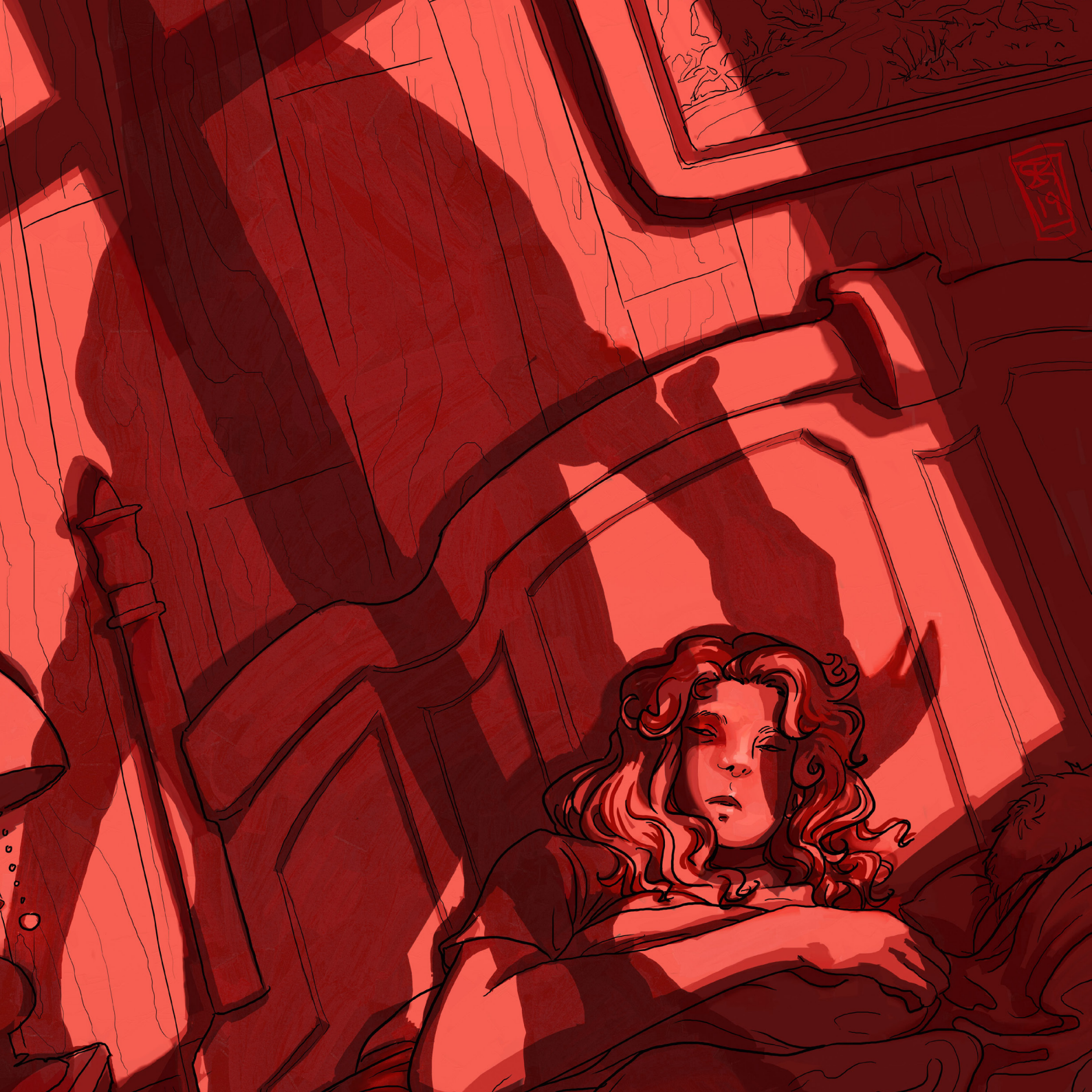
The answer might be right there in the question: it's because there's so much awfulness in the real world that it's cathartic, even pleasurable, to experience it in a safe, fictional setting. A made-up story gives us a safe playground to experiment with emotions that, let's face it, we're all going to have to cope with for real one day.

The scarier the real world gets, the more we need to process our grief, our horror, and our sadness. Monsters are scary, but they can't get us if they're on the other side of a screen. Death is scary (and sad), but staring it in the face can be an act of defiance, because hey – if we're watching a movie, it means we're not dead.

Not yet, anyway.

Sarah Dobbs, London, 2019.





BECCA & JOHN

ALWAYS A LIGHT SLEEPER, BECCA HAD SUFFERED INSOMNIA SINCE LUCAS ARRIVED.

John could sleep through anything - a terrible hailstorm last year set off every car alarm in the street, and he didn't know shit about it until she told him the next morning. At first, she tried waking him when Lucas cried, but it was a lost cause. So she got up, again and again, all through the night. Counting in the hours, 3am, 4am, hello 5am. The slightest thing woke her up. Even though she didn't need to wake up for Lucas anymore.

The floorboards creaked. For a moment her exhaustion - borderline chronic for the past 4 years - merged with a swelling joy as she thought she was home, and it was Lucas coming in to tell her that he couldn't sleep, or he was hungry, or he'd had a bad dream. That she'd just been having a bad dream. Her eyes sprung open.

No Lucas. Of course not. Not home, either. Still in the cabin; the holiday everyone assured them they needed after what they'd been through. Not her bed, but John still beside her, sleeping because of course he fucking was, he could sleep through... She realised, suddenly, that if John was asleep, something else made the floorboards creak.

As her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she saw the man standing at the end of their bed. He was holding a hammer.





HOW TO PLAY QUIETUS

THE BAREST BONES

A game of melancholy horror

Quietus is a roleplaying game of desperation and melancholy about ordinary people struggling against an implacable horror. You'll create characters with tragic backstories, and send them hurtling headlong into a nightmare where only their past traumas can save them. You'll play to find out if the characters can survive the trauma inflicted upon them by the horror, how far they'll push themselves, and discover their past scars along the way.

Media touchstones

Quietus emulates the maudlin, desperate tone of horror thrillers like *The Strangers*, *Oculus*, and *Don't Look Now*, where one or two people are tormented by motiveless killers or unfathomable supernatural forces before either being killed or barely surviving, and never without scars. Think dread over gore - at least initially, though these stories often build to a horrifically violent crescendo - and tears over laughter, always. The filmography on page 90 provides more inspiration.

How many people is this game for?

Quietus is for 2 to 3 people: a gamesmaster (GM), who runs the game, and 1 or 2 other players who take the role of one of the story's main characters. Everyone's a player, but to differentiate them from now on, we'll refer to them as the GM and the players. If you've played other roleplaying games before, this may seem like a small group - but having more players loses the sense of dread and isolation.

How long does it take to play?

Quietus is played over a single session of around 1 - 2 hours. It's endlessly replayable: you can tell a different story every time by bringing in new characters, new scenarios, and new horrors.

Dice

Quietus uses normal six-sided dice, like the kind you'd get in most boardgames. You'll need at least three - although it's best if each player has three each. The GM doesn't need any dice: only the players make rolls, so you'll need a maximum of six dice.

THE CONVERSATION AND THE FICTION

The Conversation

A game of *Quietus* is a conversation between the GM and the players where you'll tell horrific and sad stories about the characters you invent. There are no explicit turns or rounds, no formal rules to say who should go next. Instead, players take turns back-and-forth through the conversation's natural flow - much like you would during a conversation at the dinner table. The GM says something, the players respond. The players ask questions or make statements, the GM tells them what happens next.

Quietus is never a monologue; it's always a conversation. Listen to the other people playing. The conversation works best when we all listen, ask questions, and build on each others' contributions.

The players and the GM have separate roles in this conversation. The players take the role of the main characters - ordinary people in horrific circumstances. The players' main responsibility is playing their character like they're a real person, and not a horror movie protagonist. Players should think about what they might do if they were in that situation. The GM takes the role of the horror, describes the world, plays side characters, says when the dice must be rolled, and adjudicates dice results.

How the rules shape the conversation

These roles give the conversation a loose structure. The GM describes what's happening in the game and asks the players how their characters react.

Players respond by describing their characters' actions and talking in character. If a main character attempts something challenging, tense, or dangerous, the GM will ask the player to roll some dice. After the GM checks the result to see if the attempt was successful or not, the GM and the players get right back into the story, incorporating the dice rolls as they go.

Quietus uses several scores to pace out the story: anxiety, hope, despair, and dread. All scores start at zero and will rise throughout the game. Each main character has an anxiety score that measures how close they are to panicking, a despair score that measures how close the horror is to killing them, and a shared hope score that measures how close they are to getting away from or defeating the horror. The GM has one score, dread, which they can spend to make bad things happen to the characters.

You'll learn more about how and when to make rolls, raise scores, and otherwise engage mechanics throughout this book.

The Fiction

You'll notice a lot of reference to "the fiction" in this text - it's just shorthand for the story that we're telling, and the fictional world we're telling it in. When the GM describes a scene, or a player describes their main character's actions or speech, or anyone introduces new story elements, you're adding to the fiction. We distinguish the fiction from the game's mechanics such as rolling dice and raising scores.

SCORES

Main characters in *Quietus* have three scores to track: anxiety, despair, and hope. Anxiety and despair are specific to each main character, and hope is shared between both main characters. All scores start at 0 and will increase throughout the game. The GM has their own dread score they can cash in when they see fit. Side characters and horrors do not have their own scores.

Anxiety

Anxiety measures the main characters' panic levels. Each main character's anxiety starts at 0, which means they're calm. The higher your character's anxiety score, the more frantically you should play them.

Players can voluntarily increase their anxiety to do one of the following:

- ◇ Push themselves on tense and desperate rolls to get an extra die for your dice pool (page 19).
- ◇ Help another main character by giving them one additional die to their die pool (page 20).
- ◇ Bring a story element or side character into play by revealing a scar (page 22).

Panicking

If a main character's anxiety ever reaches 10, they panic. Panicking main characters can *only* attempt desperate actions from that point onwards. This is true mechanically, but also fictionally - so players should narrate all of their panicking character's actions as desperate and reckless.

Despair

Despair measures how close the horror is to killing the main character. This is both descriptive and prescriptive - the higher the character's despair, the more aggressively the horror should pursue them. At one despair, the horror may be nearby or stalking them at a distance. At four despair, the horror should be right on them, trying to kill them. Four despair is the final act of a horror movie, where a single action could save or kill the main character.

When your character's despair reaches five, the horror kills them. No ifs, buts, maybes, or get outs. The main character's dead - you might choke out some last words, but otherwise it's the end for them. The GM and player should work together to make their end as sad and scary as possible.

If there are two main characters and one dies, the player with the deceased character is still involved. The player can suggest consequences and complications to the GM, and play characters in scar scenes. However, it's very unlikely that one of the characters will die early in the game.

The GM *cannot* increase despair arbitrarily. Despair will *only* increase through mixed results and failures, or when the GM spends dread points

A main character *cannot* die until their despair reaches five, no matter how dire their situation. That said, players should remember to play their character as if

they're a real person. Avoid using this knowledge to take seemingly suicidal risks that don't make sense in the fiction.

Despair is not hit points

Despair is *not* a measure health or injury. Injuries can be inflicted via consequences, but are handled entirely in the fiction. A broken leg does not affect how many dice you roll, but it *does* affect the type of actions the main character can attempt, or the tension of a roll. If a main character is running away from a masked killer in perfect health, that's probably a tense roll; if they're dragging themselves away from the killer with a mangled leg, that's a desperate roll.

Despair has no bearing on any of this - if a main character's despair hits five while they're perfectly healthy and uninjured, the horror still kills them.

Hope

Hope is shared between the main characters. Hope is an abstract measure of the main characters' actions toward escaping or defeating the horror. It starts at zero. If hope reaches five, any main characters who are still alive reach safety or defeat the horror. Main characters *cannot* escape or defeat the horror until hope reaches five, even if the fiction would suggest otherwise. If the main characters try to escape or defeat the horror - a perfectly reasonable thing for them to attempt - the GM should steer the fiction back into the horror's clutches. For example, if the main characters flee in a car when the hope score is below 5, something will bring them back in - perhaps the horror set up booby traps on the road to thwart escapes?

Awarding hope

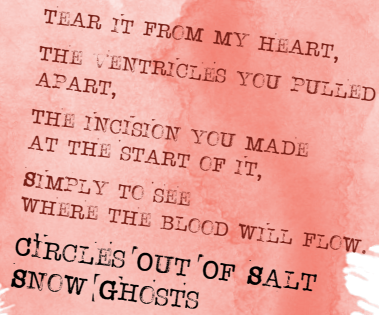
When a main character's actions would put them closer to escape and the corresponding roll is a success or a mitigated success, the GM *must* award hope. The GM must tell the player *before* a roll that it may increase their hope score. Examples could include calling for help, repairing a sabotaged car, attacking the horror, but can be anything if the GM thinks would help escape or defeat the horror. However, not every action will directly aid the character's escape - some actions will merely advance the story or deal with previous consequences. If the you think an action should raise your hope, and the GM hasn't mentioned it, ask them. If it sounds reasonable, they must agree.

Dread

The GM has a single score - dread. Like all scores in *Quietus*, it starts at zero. But unlike other scores, it decreases when the GM spends dread.



Whenever a player should suffer a consequence, the GM can opt to take a point or more of dread instead. The GM may take dread if a consequence doesn't make sense in the fiction, or when they can't think of an appropriate consequence right now. There's no cap on the amount of dread the GM can have. The GM can spend dread at any point to inflict consequences or raise a character's despair, even when no roll has been made.



TEAR IT FROM MY HEART,
THE VENTRICLES YOU PULLED
APART,
THE INCISION YOU MADE
AT THE START OF IT,
SIMPLY TO SEE
WHERE THE BLOOD WILL FLOW.
CIRCLES 'OUT' OF SALT
SNOW [GHOSTS

When you narrate your main character attempting something difficult, the GM should ask you to make a roll. If the GM thinks the main character's actions don't amount to a challenge, the main character just achieves what they're attempting with no roll required. Similarly, if the GM determines that what they're trying to do is impossible, the player doesn't roll - it just can't be achieved. Consequences of previous rolls should factor into what's trivial and what's impossible.

If your main character's actions amount to a challenge, the GM will ask you to roll some dice to determine the outcome. The process of rolling dice goes like this:

- ◇ 2 dread: The GM can inflict a consequence on a main character.
- ◇ 3 dread: The GM can inflict a severe consequence on a main character.
- ◇ 4 dread: The GM can raise a main character's despair by one. However, this can't be used to raise a main character's despair to five - that final quietus is up to the dice.

Sessions of *Quietus* generally work best when hope and despair are roughly equal. Dread is the GM's way to manage that balance. If you want a faster game, you can save up your dread and spend it all on raising despair. If you want a slower paced, more doom laden game, you can spend it on having consequences occur outside of rolls.

ROLLING THE DICE

The GM decides the roll's tension. The tension indicates how severe the fictional consequences will be for the main character upon a failure, and how likely the main character's despair score is to rise. The three grades of tension are:

- ◇ Uneasy: If the roll fails, the player can try a different approach or roll again at a higher tension level.
- ◇ Tense: If the roll fails, the main character will suffer a consequence or attract the horror's attention.
- ◇ Desperate: If the roll fails, the main character will suffer a severe consequence and attract the horror's attention.

The dice pool

Once the GM decides the tension grade, you need to grab a few dice, called a *dice pool*. The dice pool starts with 1 die. The player can add up to 2 additional dice to the pool by taking options from the list below. You can never roll more than 3 dice for any particular roll.

- ◇ You push yourself on tense and desperate rolls
- ◇ You accept help from another character
- ◇ You work in an element introduced via a scar
- ◇ Your character betrays the other character

Results

After you roll your dice pool, look at the single highest die rolled to get the result. The roll's tension influences the specific outcome for the fiction, but in short, a 6 is a success, a 4 or 5 is a mixed result or mitigated success, and 3, 2, or 1 is a failure.

After a roll

After a player makes a roll, the conversation resumes. The conversation follows the consequences of the main characters' actions (both successful and unsuccessful), until another roll is required as the main characters face another challenge. This is game's core loop - the GM describes the (potentially challenging) situation, the players describe how their characters attempt to overcome the challenge, which engages the mechanics and may cause either hope or despair to rise, and then we go back to the fiction. Repeat the loop until either hope or despair reaches their limit, and the game ends.

Increasing the chance of success

Rolling a single die is a risky affair, with only a 50% chance of a mitigated success or better. The more dice you roll, the more likely you are to get a higher result.

Pushing yourself

You can push your main character on tense or desperate rolls to add 1 die to your pool. Just describe your character making an extra effort to overcome the challenge. If you push yourself on a tense roll, roll a die and add the result to your anxiety. If you push yourself on a desperate roll, roll a die and divide the result by two (rounding up), and add it to your anxiety score - so rolling a 1 or 2 raises your score by 1. A 3 or 4 raises your score by 2, and a 5 or 6 raises your score by 3.

Receiving less anxiety when pushing yourself on a desperate roll may seem counter-intuitive. However, think about that moment when you go from mild unease into a tense, fight-or-flight situation - your adrenaline ramps up and sends you toward panic.

Getting help from another character

If another character - either a player's main character or a GM's side character - is willing and reasonably able to help, the player adds 1 die to their pool. However, the assisting character opens themselves up to consequences if the roll fails. The consequences are different for main characters and side characters .

Giving help as a main character

Help must come from the fiction, meaning any help ought to be achievable and in tone with the game. The helping player increases their anxiety by 1, and the player receiving help adds 1 die to their dice pool. However, helping is dangerous business. If the player who rolled suffers a consequence (from a fail or mitigated success), the helping character also suffers an equivalent consequence. Likewise, if the rolling player increases their despair after the roll, so does the helping player.

Giving help as a side character

A player can ask a GM's side character for help too. The GM should agree, unless there is a strong fictional reason for the side character to say no. If the side character helps, the player rolling adds an extra die to their pool. However, being a side character is also dangerous business. There's a 50% chance the side character will die, even if the main character suffers no consequences. When a player rolls with a side character's help, the GM adds the consequence from the table below to the roll's outcome. Say a player rolls a 2 on a tense roll - the player decides to increase their despair *and* the side character succumbs to the horror.

Although side characters are helpful, the GM should respect the fiction. Yes, side characters will usually help main characters with mechanical bonuses until they die. However, the GM should play side characters as living, breathing people with their own agendas - so they might not help in all circumstances. If things get too tough, the side character may even abandon the main characters as a consequence for a roll - if it makes sense for the fiction.

Until then, a player can ask a side character to help them if it's fictionally appropriate. If the GM agrees that it's reasonable, the side character grants a bonus die to the dice pool - but they're very likely to become collateral damage as the main characters flee the horror. In addition to consequences affecting the main characters, side characters suffer as follows:

Uneasy rolls

- ◇ 1 - 3: The side character is killed by the horror.

Tense rolls

- ◇ 4 - 5: The side character suffers a related consequence to yours.
- ◇ 1 - 3: The side character is killed by the horror.

Desperate rolls

- ◇ 1 - 5: The side character is killed by the horror.

Betrayal

A player gets 2 extra dice (still to a maximum of 3) when they describe how their character puts the other main character in danger. The other main character raises *their* despair by 1.

You cannot betray the other main character if this would push their despair to 5 - a main character can only be killed as a result of a roll made by that character's player, or as a consequence of helping another character.

YOU ALWAYS CARED FOR ME
THAT WAS EASY ENOUGH TO SEE
YOU ALWAYS CARED FOR ME
AND I PUSHED YOU IN THE DARK
BRIGHT BRIGHT BRIGHT
DARK DARK DARK

RESULTS PER TENSION LEVEL

Uneasy rolls

- ◇ 6: The character achieves what they set out to do.
- ◇ 4 - 5: They achieve a lesser version of what they wanted, or they can try again to get what they want via a tense roll.
- ◇ 1 - 3: They don't achieve what they wanted, but hope isn't lost. The GM takes a point of dread. The main character can try a different approach and make another uneasy roll, or they can push on with their current course of action and make a tense roll.

Tense rolls

- ◇ 6: The character achieves what they set out to do.
- ◇ 4 - 5: They achieve a lesser version of what they were attempting, suffer a consequence, and the GM takes a point of dread. The main character can either stop there, or they can push on with a desperate roll if it makes sense in the fiction.
- ◇ 1 - 3: They don't achieve what they set out to do. The player chooses to either suffer a severe consequence (or the GM can opt to take 2 points of dread instead), or they increase their despair track by 1. As makes sense in the fiction, the main character can try a different approach with another tense roll, or they can continue pushing on with a desperate roll.

Desperate rolls

- ◇ 6: The character achieves what they set out to do, but the GM takes 1 point of dread.
- ◇ 4 - 5: They achieve what they set out to do, but the GM takes 2 points of dread. The player also chooses to suffer a severe consequence or raise their despair track by 1.
- ◇ 1 - 3: They don't achieve what they set out to do, suffer a severe consequence, increase their despair track by 1, and the GM gains 2 points of dread.



SCARS

Each main character carries scars - painful memories from the past - that they use to help them overcome the horror. Generally, players will only describe what their characters say and do as they react to the world around them. Scars are an exception; they give players the power to narrate their characters' background. Scars both build a rich, collaborative story and give the main characters a better shot at making it out alive. The scars told let players introduce helpful side characters or story elements they can use to gain bonus dice. Story elements are things like weapons, keys, and other objects that give a main character a better chance of combatting the horror.

Revealing Scars

The player must tell a melancholy story from their character's past to reveal a scar and introduce an element or side character. The story must take the form a flashback, where you describe events of the past as they're relevant to the present situation. Most importantly, the flashback must be a time where something went horribly wrong for the main character. The player then raises their character's anxiety by 2 because of the painful memories. Main characters only raise their anxiety by 2 when revealing the scar - the process of opening up old wounds is painful. Using the resulting element does not raise anxiety.

Scars are the key to *Quietus*' melancholic horror - revel in these quiet, sad moments in a storm of desperation. You might be tempted to quickly outline the flashback in one or two sentences so the action can resume.

Take your time here. You and the GM should agree on the memory and what element it introduces, and then spend a few minutes playing out that scene together. If the other player isn't involved, they can suggest scene details or play side characters in the flashback.

During the conversation, players can ask if something is present in the fiction - exits and entrances, nearby objects, other things they might leverage. The GM can just agree and describe what it looks like, in which case the thing exists in the fiction but has no mechanical effect. Otherwise, the GM can suggest the player introduce it as an element via a scar.

Alternatively, a player can suggest a side character or element that they want to introduce to the GM. The player and GM should then discuss and agree that the element could potentially aid one or more future rolls - a cell phone, car keys, a neighbour, or an improvised weapon, for example. Once the player and GM agree on the side character or element, the player reveals a scar through a flashback.

An element or side character can aid any roll where the element could feasibly help. If the GM agrees, the player describes how the element aids them in the fiction, and adds a bonus die to their dice pool. *GM note:* Yes, elements can be destroyed as a consequence for failed rolls. However, make sure the player gets to use the element at least once in a roll before you do. The player paid the price by revealing a scar - they should get the chance to benefit from that cost.

AN UNEASY ROLL'

Donogh is playing Rachel, who's hiding out in a shuttered off-season ski-resort to escape from her abusive boyfriend. Oli is GMing. Rachel wakes up when she hears a car pulling up on the gravel outside in the middle of the night. She's not expecting anyone else to be here; she knows her friend Matt is running an errand in the nearest town and won't be back until tomorrow.

Donogh: I want to get to the window and see who it is.

Oli: Are you just walking up there, are you sneaking up there?

Donogh: Hmmm... I'm not expecting anyone at this time of night, so I want to see who it is without being seen myself.

Oli: Okay, that sounds like a challenge, so it's time for a roll. Nothing particularly frightening has happened so far, and it might just be Matt, so let's go for an Uneasy roll. Did you want to bring in any extra dice?

Donogh: I don't think I need them yet...

Donogh rolls a 3.

Donogh: Okay, apparently I did need them.

Oli: Okay, so I get a point of dread, and you don't get what you want yet. You look out, and it's definitely not Matt's car. It's this rusty old pickup truck...

Donogh: A serial killer's vehicle of choice.

Oli: Mmhmm. But you can't see who's there. Do you want to get a lesser version of what you were after, or do you push on for a tense roll?

Donogh: I don't recognise the car, so I think Rachel has a bit of a pit in her stomach. Let's go for that tense roll.

Oli: Okay, so to get a better look, you'll have to pull the net curtains right back. There's a good chance that whoever's out there will see you, hence the tense roll.

Donogh rolls and gets a 4. He's going to get what he wants, but with a consequence.

Oli: You pull back the curtains and get a good look at the guy standing by the pickup. He's wearing grubby workman's clothes - maybe a car mechanic? But he's also wearing a mask. It's a white, plain mask - like the kind unpainted mask you'd get in an arts and crafts store to decorate. Your phone rings as you're looking down at him, and it's deafening in the dark. The man in the white mask looks up to where the noise came from. It's mere seconds before he'll see you. What do you do?

A' TENSE ROLL

Dan and Jenny are playing father and son, Miles (Dan) and Alex (Jenny). The two are trying to bond after a period of estrangement. They're meant to be staying at Miles' boss' cabin. However, they get lost and turn up at the wrong place, finding it inhabited by its less than friendly owner. Worse, Alex spots a corpse between the loose slats of the wooden porch. Ryan is GMing.

Ryan: The guy's just standing there, holding a shotgun. He's not pointing it at you, doesn't even have his finger on the trigger. But he looks like the kind of guy that'd use it, and the body under the porch suggests he already has. He turns to you: 'The fuck are you doing here?'

Dan: 'Hey, look, we've obviously just come to the wrong place...'

Ryan: 'I'd say so, yeah.' His finger moves to the trigger.

Jenny: Miles hasn't spotted the corpse yet, right? I'm going to try to draw Miles' attention to it.

Ryan: Without the shotgun-guy noticing? That's going to be a tense roll.

Jenny builds her dice pool. She's not pushing herself, and she can't get Miles' help as she's trying to get his attention, so she only rolls 1 die. It turns up a 4 - a mixed success.

Ryan: You grab Miles' sleeve and draw his attention to the dead face staring up through the slats. But the guy on the porch spots you. He leers at you and raises the shotgun level with your head. 'Something caught your eye?'

A DESPERATE ROLL AND PUSHING YOURSELF

Tyler and Tomer are playing brothers Saul and Isaac. They're on a road trip across country to help Saul get over his recent divorce. Unfortunately, they attract the attention of a serial murderer along the way. While trying to get away from him, they crash into a ditch. Saul is awake and injured, but Isaac is unconscious from the crash. Katy is GMing.

Katy: The stranger in the car behind pulls to a stop. He's not even pulling into the side of the road, he's just stopped, midway across the lanes, the headlights of his car cutting through the darkness. You feel like you're in a spotlight. He pauses there for a few seconds and then gets out of the car, shotgun in hand and starts walking towards you. What do you do?

Tomer: I'm unconscious. So, I guess, nothing?

Tyler: Do I have time to wake Isaac up before the stranger gets to the car?

Katy: I'd say that would be a desperate roll. And

honestly, even if he's awake when this guy gets there, you're still going to be stuck in the car.

Tyler: Right, yeah. Fuck. Okay, how badly are we in this ditch?

Katy: The last roll was a 1 on a tense roll, so pretty badly. You'll probably need to a truck to get you out.

Tyler: Or... I could just gun it and hope for the best.

Katy: You certainly could. That'll definitely be a desperate roll.

Tyler: I'm going to be giving it my absolute all, since this guy's bearing down on us, fully scraping metal and screaming at the car to go - does that count as pushing myself?

Katy: Sounds good.

Tyler rolls 2 dice. His highest die is a 4. He either has to take a severe consequence, or raise his despair by 1.

Tyler: I'm already at despair 4, so that's a big nope. Sigh. Let's take the consequence.

Katy: Okay, so you manage to wrench the car out of the ditch - it's screaming and protesting all the way. You see the stranger taking aim with the shotgun through the rear view mirror and hear the blast - it's like thunder, it's that close. If you hadn't moved, it would've ripped straight through the back window into your head. As it is, you're flying up over the ditch, and it hits your tire instead, which explodes. The wheel's metal screams as it scrapes against the desert floor. You're not going to be able to keep control of it much longer. What do you do?

Tomer: Now'd be a good time to shake me awake...

[GETTING HELP FROM A MAIN CHARACTER

Lauren is GMing. Tomer and Angel are playing Caesar (Tomer) and Jesse (Angel). They're on the run following a botched robbery at Caesar's grandmother's house in which their accomplice, Laura, died. They take shelter in an abandoned underground survivalist bunker, only to find it haunted by bad memories. Unable to handle the phantoms, Jesse leaves to try their luck with the cops waiting outside. Caesar and Jesse have 4 despair each, so a final roll will decide how their story ends.

Lauren: Jesse, you're almost blinded by the light as you pull yourself out of the escape hatch. In addition to the morning sun shining off of the snow, there's blue and red flashing lights. The police are all screaming at you, training guns at you, "Hands on your head! Down on the ground!"

Angel rolled 1 on his last attempt to get away from the phantoms. Caesar is trailing behind Jesse, pursued by simulacra of his grandmother and Laura.

Lauren: Caesar, you're frantically climbing up the ladder too. You can hear the cops shouting and the blast of the sirens. You're almost there, when something grabs your legs - you look back and it's Laura and your grandmother, pulling you down towards them.

Angel: I'm trying to kick them away while pulling myself up those final few rungs.

Lauren: They're supernaturally strong and your grip is slipping. It's going to be a desperate roll...

Angel: I've only got one die. I start screaming for Jesse to help me.

Tomer: Yeah. This is a horrible idea, but I'm going to dash away from the cops so I can help pull Caesar up. I'm going to regret this, aren't I?

Tomer increases his anxiety by 1 for helping. Angel rolls 2 dice. The highest comes up 2. Bad news for Caesar, but also for Jesse as he gets an equivalent consequence. Since they failed a desperate roll, both Angel and Tomer increase their despair by 1 - from 4 to 5. Since they have 5 despair each, both main characters will die.

Lauren: Jesse, you dash back to the hole that leads out of the bunker. You can hear the crack of gunfire - one after the other, after the other. The first few miss, and you manage to get to the hatch and grab Caesar's hand. You're pulling against the phantoms below, and you're winning - and then the first bullet hits you. Then another. Then another. Caesar, you see the light go out of Jesse's eyes, and his grasp on you weakens... you're dragged screaming off of the ladder and down into the darkness of the bunker.

[GETTING HELP FROM A SIDE CHARACTER

Oli is GMing. Donogh is playing Rachel - and things are going badly for her. She fled the ski resort and is now being chased by a masked killer. Previously, Donogh introduced a side character via a scar - an old couple Rachel saw in a log cabin on her way to the resort. Seeing them together and happy in their later years reminded Rachel of the awful gaslighting from her ex-partner. Rachel's despair is at 4, and her hope is at 3.

Oli: Okay, so you're sprinting up the hill towards the cabin, but you hear an engine roar behind you - sounds like the stranger gave up chasing you on foot and went back for his car. You can see the lights coming through the trees towards you, cutting angel beams in the early morning mist.

Donogh: Shit. I need to get into the house and away from him. I'm going to rush up to the door. I start hammering on it, crying out for help.

Oli: Right, you're on foot and badly injured, and you're being pursued by a car - that sounds pretty desperate. Though, I'd say getting into the house would raise your hope by 1 as long as you don't roll a one to three...

Donogh: Me too. Can I get an extra die by involving the old man I saw in the cabin earlier?

Oli: Sure, although that's unlikely to end well for him...

Donogh: Desperate times...

Donogh rolls 2 dice. His highest die is a 5 - a mitigated success; he'll get what he wants, but there'll be consequences for Rachel, and worse for the old man.

Oli: Okay, so you're hammering on the door, and you hear the car get closer and closer. A light goes on upstairs...

Donogh: I start screaming and waving, trying to get their attention.

Oli: You see the old man at the window, and then he leaves. You hear him coming down the stairs right as you see the stranger's car pull into view. The door unbolts and opens. The car stops, and the stranger gets out with his rifle. The old man opens the door, and is grousing at you, "Don't you know what time this is? What the hell are you doing hammering on my door at this hour?"

Donogh: I ignore him and just push past.

Oli: Okay, raise your hope by 1. However, as you push past, the old man turns to follow you, screaming at you to get out of his house. The

there's a crack. Sounds like thunder. Most of the old man's face isn't there any more, it's just a pulpy, bloody mess, like hammered steak. After a second he collapses to the floor. You see the stranger behind him, smoking rifle in hand.

A BETRAYAL

Paul and Will are playing Alan and Kit. Alan is a security guard at a condemned industrial estate on the edge of London, and Kit is a homeless kid squatting there. They've been brought together by the murderous ghosts that haunt the estate, who are being raised en masse by the prospect of its destruction. Alan is taking shelter in his cabin, and Kit is stuck outside. The ghosts are stalking the estate looking for them both. Oli is GMing.

Will: What chance have I got if I just fucking run for it, could I make it to the gates?

Oli: There's no way of you getting across without them seeing you. It's going to be a desperate roll.

Paul: And Alan's stuck in the cabin, so I can't help. Sorry.

Will: And my anxiety is already at 10, so I can't push myself any further. Shit. Could I distract the ghosts in some way?

Oli: You could, and if you screw Alan over at the same time, you'd get a couple of bonus dice for it...

Paul: Dude.

Will: Yeah, that sounds good.

Paul: DUDE.

Will: I pick up an abandoned Coke can that's rattling about on the floor, fill it with a couple of stones so that it'll travel in the wind, and throw it so that it bounces off against the cabin's window.

Oli: The can flies through the air and lands against the window with a dull "thunk"; it's not loud, but the estate was otherwise deadly quiet. Slowly, one at a time, each of the ghosts cranes its neck around to see Alan's terrified face looking out. Will, you can roll 3 dice as Kit takes his chance and sprints away...

REVEALING A SCAR

Kate is playing Dharma, a new age therapist. Dharma recently recovered from a mystery illness that had her incapacitated with pain for almost a decade, and stole her twenties and early thirties from her. Her greatest fear is becoming ill again. She's started a healing retreat deep in the desert and is trying to put her past behind her. However, her sudden recovery attracts the attention of a terminally ill cult leader who's convinced that a transfusion of Dharma's blood is the only thing that can save him. He intends to extract it from her violently. Ferrel is GMing.

Ferrel: Brother Joshua has his followers pin you down to the massage table. He calmly approaches you with the filthiest syringe you've ever seen, which is attached to a length of rubber hosing. He then taps the air out of it like he knows what he's doing, but it's just stuff he's seen from TV - you can tell he doesn't have any actual medical training. Even if he doesn't exsanguinate you as he's planning, that needle and his lack of skill is going to fuck you up...

Kate: Shit, I need a weapon. Is there a rock nearby?

Ferrel: Why would there be a rock in the therapy room?

Kate: Okay, not a rock, but like... oh, what about a salt lamp? Those things are heavy.

Ferrel: I think there's a good chance they've got one there. But if you want to introduce one into

the story, you're going to have to reveal a scar. Tell me a sad story about a rock, somehow - something like you're trying to hit Brother Joshua with.

Kate: Oh, God, how can there be a sad story about a rock? Wait, I've got it, what sort of animals would there be around here?

Ferrel: It's the desert, so coyotes maybe?

Kate: Okay, so a couple of years ago, when I was in constant pain but nobody would diagnose me with anything, I was driving back this way from the doctor. I was furious and sad, and driving too fast, and not paying attention. Then I look up and see a coyote in the road in front of me. I haven't got time to stop. There's this thump as I hit it, and another as it goes under my back wheels.

Ferrel: What did you do?

Kate: I screeched the car to a halt, kind of in shock. I waited there a few minutes getting my breath back. Then I heard the whimpering. I got out and looked back where the coyote was lying. Its back legs and part of its spine were crushed. It was miles to the next town, who even knows if it had a vet anyway. I picked up a rock and caved its head in. It took longer than I thought. I cried the whole time and got back in my car covered in blood. That was the first time I ever killed something.



SARAH & AURA

AS FAR BACK AS SARAH'S MEMORY STRETCHED, SHE REMEMBERED HIDING HERE.

She didn't remember much of her childhood - childhood amnesia, the doctors assured her, was pretty common and nothing to worry about - but what she did remember was this wardrobe: cramped, dark, and smelling like a thrift store. But safe, like a womb with fake fur coats.

She'd hidden here while playing games like hide and seek and forty-forty - and sardines when she got older for the thrill of crushing up next to someone else.

She'd hidden here when her parents argued. The fighting had gone on for as long as she could remember, and often. She supposed forever. When she couldn't listen to her parents argue any longer - about how her father didn't agree with her mother's religion, about how they were raising Sarah, about her mother's annoying sneezing, any excuse - she would wrap one of the fur coats around her. The noise would stop, and she'd be smothered by the thrift store smell.

She recalled hiding in here when she brought Aura home for Thanksgiving. They could have made out anywhere, but the cupboard seemed right. Sardines again.

Sarah tried not to wonder if Aura was still alive. She hadn't heard her in a while. She'd heard Aura running and screaming, and then just screaming, and then Sarah wrapped the coat around herself when she couldn't cope any longer. The smell and the silence took her.

She couldn't hear the cupboard door open, but she felt the cold rush of air and the invading light. Her mother pulled the coat gently off of her.

'You need to find a new hiding place, sweetheart, we know everywhere you go.'

Her mother's white robe was spattered red. The rest of the congregation filtered into the room, all dressed identically, except for the natural variation in blood spatter. Even with the coat gone, Sarah couldn't hear Aura any more.





SAFETY TOOLS

INTRODUCTION TO SAFETY TOOLS

Why do we need safety tools?

You may be wondering why we need safety tools. This is, after all, a horror game. Should horror really be safe? The quick answer is: yes. This is a game, and it can be a scary and emotionally manipulative game - but it's still a game. It shouldn't be a genuinely traumatic experience for anyone playing.

Safety makes fear fun

Think of other forms of scary entertainment. You go into a horror movie expecting to be scared, terrified even - but you don't want to come out of it with PTSD. That'd be ridiculous, nobody would watch horror movies any more. Rollercoasters are fun precisely because you know they're safe. You wouldn't get on a rollercoaster without a safety harness. With the harness, it becomes fun, while still being scary. You get to experience the terror without dying.

Even at the most extreme, seemingly unsafe fear-based entertainment - like extreme haunted houses where people queue up around the block to have an actor lock their heads in cages and dunk them in fake blood

- we still live by the basic societal safety standard that the actor will not actually hurt you, no matter what the waiver you sign beforehand says.

Safety means everyone can play

It goes without saying, but everyone comes to a game with different life experiences. What may be nothing to you may be extremely offensive or even triggering for someone else in your game.

Most people would prefer not to discuss the things they find uncomfortable in detail - even talking about things in the context of 'don't do it' can be upsetting. Safety tools make this conversation easier, as players can articulate their boundaries before and during the game. Which also means...

Safety means you can push further

Safety tools let you push even harder at the core themes of horror and tragedy. Driving fast is fun because you know you have breaks. For example, playing with the X-card (which is explained more below) gives you breaks.

You can describe more graphically horrific or creepy scenes because if you start going too far, anyone can tap the X-card and it immediately stops. You don't have to second guess yourself.

Of course, all players should respect any boundaries established before and during play. If someone says they'd rather not play with graphic violence, don't use safety tools (like the X-card) to push violence into a place that could cause them discomfort.

Everyone is responsible for safe play

The GM is responsible for briefing everyone on safety tools before starting the game, but that doesn't mean that they're in charge of them.

The GM can absolutely X-card a player, players can X-card each other, and everyone can X-card the GM. And while the GM isn't in charge of safety tools, it's good practice to remind the the players that they can use them.

If you're about to describe something particularly gruesome, tell the players you're about to do so and remind them they can X-card the content at any point.

Are the authors of this game just SJW snowflakes?

If you're asking that question, perhaps this isn't a game for you. Maybe put the book back on the shelf and go pick something up from the *Lamentations of the Flame Princess* section instead.

MINIMUM SUGGESTED SAFETY TOOLS

CATS

Before playing *Quietus*, or even introducing the rules, the table must have a conversation to set everyone's expectations. Sessions where players share a mutual understanding of the game tend to run more smoothly. This game uses Patrick O'Reilly's CATS process (Content, Aim, Tone and Subject Matter) to quickly and easily set expectations. The GM will present the following four essential topics:

Concept

Start by pitching the game at a high level. For example, '*Quietus* is a game about tragic horror stories inspired by movies like *The Strangers*, *Oculus*, and the recent Netflix version of *The Haunting of Hill House*.'

Aim

Explain what you're all trying to accomplish together. You're here to tell a specific type of story, set usually in the modern world. Hope and Despair provide a sort of win and lose condition, but they're mostly there to pace the story. As long as we create a scary, melancholy tale, everyone wins.

Tone

Have a quick conversation about the game's tone. *Quietus*' tone is key: it's a game of melancholy horror. If you ever move away from those two subjects, you're getting away from what makes the game sing. Crucially, *Quietus* is not a slasher game, despite sharing some surface level features with slasher movies.

Dread and sadness will constantly build, but with no pressure release via a bodycount. It may help to list some of the movies from the Filmography on page 90 as examples of the kind of story and tone *Quietus* emulates.

Subject Matter

Disclose all themes or ideas might be explored during gameplay - especially the horrific or potentially triggering aspects of the game. Explain that there is likely to be some upsetting content and graphic violence described during the session. That's an excellent time to segue to the next safety tool, Lines and Veils.

Lines and veils

Lines and Veils is a safety tool that establishes content boundaries both at the start of the session and during the game. It first appeared in the roleplaying game *Sex & Sorcery* by Ron Edwards.

- ◇ A Line is a subject that a player absolutely does not want to be discussed or featured in the game at all.
- ◇ A Veil is a subject that a player is willing to see in the game as long as it is not described graphically.

At the start of the game, GM should declare their Lines and Veils first so others are more comfortable about disclosing their Lines and Veils. The GM should ask for each other player's Lines and Veils.

We strongly suggest always having a Line on sexual violence and violence against children, and also strongly suggest a veil on slurs.

Several of the quick-start scenarios in Chapter 5, *Thirteen Tragedies*, explore race and racism - so they can be implied, but not said at the table.

A player's Lines and Veils should never be challenged or questioned. If someone doesn't want a subject to feature in your game of *Quietus*, they don't have to justify why.

Players can also use Lines and Veils to veto subjects they simply find boring. If you ghosts aren't your thing, it's perfectly acceptable to have a Line on ghosts.

The X-card

The X-card, created by John Stavropoulos, is a tool that that allows anyone, including the GM, to edit out content during play. Since *Quietus* is an improvisational game, you won't know what will happen till it happens, so it's possible the game might go in a direction that people don't want. The X-card lets players fix problems as they arise.

Draw an X on an index card in the centre of the table, or download a *Quietus* X-card at quietus.co.uk. If anyone wants to use the X-card, all they have to do is touch it. At that point, rewind the fiction and start before the offending content was introduced. If you're playing online through a video chat, players can make an X with their arms, say 'X', or type 'X-card' in a group chat.

The X-card is useful for editing out content that makes anyone feel uncomfortable in a way that isn't fun.

Quietus is about tragic horror, so some level of tension and unease is part of the game. However, if that tension becomes a problem, anyone can touch the X-card. They don't have to explain why they used the X-card (although they may do so if they would like).

If you, the GM, are not sure what was X-carded, take a short break and ask the person to clarify what content they would like edited out. If they don't want to discuss it, don't push them to do so. Instead, start the whole scene from the beginning.

Remind people that the X-card is in play. If you're going to describe some particularly gruesome violence, maybe preface it with, 'I'm about to describe something pretty gross now. So, I'd just like to remind everyone that the X-card is on the table and can be used at any time.'

Players can also use the X-card to edit out content that doesn't fit the game's mood or tone, or that they just aren't interested in exploring. Maintaining the game's mood is a crucial part of a good *Quietus* session.

Checking in

In roleplaying games, as in life in general, consent isn't a one-time decision - it's a process, and it can be changed or revoked at any time. Yes, the players agreed to play *Quietus*, but they're not obligated to see it through to the end. Yes, you have content in Lines and Veils, but it's not a static or exhaustive list. People's comfort levels can change during gameplay.

The X-card is there to handle those sort of situations, but using it takes confidence, and confidence often drains away when confronting something that makes us feel uncomfortable or triggered. It can be difficult to speak up in the moment.

If you, the GM, notice a player looking uncomfortable, check in with them. Make sure they're feeling okay and are happy to continue, and ask if there is some content to X-card, Line, or Veil. If you're playing face to face, take a short break and quietly check in with the player - doing so takes the focus off of them and lets everyone stretch their legs or get a refreshment. If you're playing online (via a hangout app like Roll20 or Google Hangouts), take a break and drop the player a private message. Once you're back, X-card, Line, or Veil anything you need to, and carry on with the game. It's possible the player won't want to continue, and that's fine too - safety is more important than the game.

Open Door Policy

One of the simplest and most effective safety tools is the Open Door Policy - simply let people leave if they're not having fun. Nobody - including the GM - is obligated to see the game through to the end. If you're finding a horror movie too scary, too violent, distasteful, or just not for you, you'd turn it off. The same applies here. If you're the person who brought *Quietus* to the table, especially if you're the GM, remind everyone that the door is always open at the start of the game, and that anyone may leave the game for any reason.



DANIEL

SOME OF THE TIME - MORE AND MORE, AS IT WENT ON - DANIEL JUST FELT OLD.

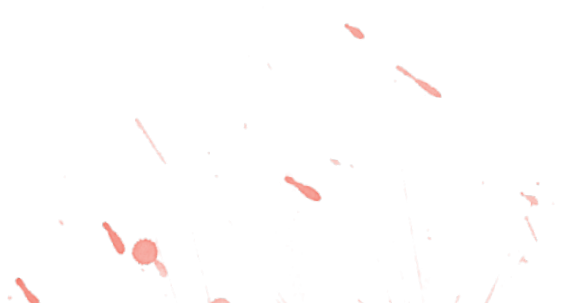
But when he was feeling himself, he told himself that he was, in fact, old school. Everyone in the office was a couple of decades younger than him - the consequence of staying in his last job for way too long despite it going nowhere, because he was going to be an actor. But that went nowhere too. He was hot enough for it to have worked, but the roles just weren't there for Asian men, he was told. A couple of soap opera episodes was the highlight, and he didn't consider it much of one.

The only thing that made him feel young now was fucking, and he was still hot enough for that. The kids in his office were all on Tinder, but Daniel still had a book of numbers, and not even a list on a cell, an actual, honest to goodness, distressed leather-bound Moleskine. Classic, old school. He'd flick through it, pick a number, and be a star for the night again.

Last week, he'd flicked through and noticed a name and a number he didn't recognise. He couldn't be expected to remember everyone. He figured he'd see if he could jog his memory. He dialed, but when they answered, it was just this noise - he couldn't make it out; machinery maybe, metal screaming against metal, or like pigs squealing? Some Nine Inch Nails sounding shit. He hung up, tried another number.

Yesterday, there was another name he didn't know. Another number. He dialed. Metal on metal, animal sounds. And a voice, one he'd never heard before. Pleading for help. Asking for him, by name. He hung up. Didn't dial another number.

Today, the book is full of names and numbers he doesn't know. They spill out, written on his walls, painted in still wet white paint on his 4k TV. Carved in his left forearm.



CHARACTERS, HORRORS & TRAGEDIES

CHARACTER & SCENARIO CREATION

Once you've gone through the safety and rules briefing, it's time for you to guide the players through the character and scenario creation. Each player creates one character, which they do by answering a few simple questions.

For some of the questions, it'll make sense for all the players to answer the question together; for others that are specifically about their character, it'll make sense for them to answer them alone. Players are welcome to ask the other player and the GM for input, or make suggestions to the other player. However, the player always has final say over a question about their character. If players can't reach a consensus on joint questions, the GM can make suggestions and finally act as a tie breaker.

At the beginning of character creation, ask the players the following questions about their characters.

- ◇ You're somewhere isolated. Where? Tell me about the place.
- ◇ Why are you in such an isolated place?
- ◇ What's your relationship to each other? *
- ◇ Why does it pain you to be here?
- ◇ What's your name?
- ◇ What do you look like?
- ◇ Something went wrong yesterday. What was it?
- ◇ There should be someone else nearby, but there isn't. Where are they?
- ◇ What are you most afraid of?

* This question does not need to be answered in a one player game. You can ask these questions one after the other, word for word, but you don't have to - they'll probably flow into each other and cross over naturally. Remember, the game is a conversation, so treat it like one. Either way, make sure you have answers to all of the questions by the end of character creation.

FIRST WE WERE BORN
THEN WE RAN SLOWLY OUT OF LUCK
24
EMMY THE GREAT

These questions are very much a part of play. If a game of *Quietus* is a movie, these questions are the opening act. They establish the movie's premise, who the main characters are, what their relationship is to each other, and their current situation.

Ask follow up questions and dig deeper into the characters. Follow-up questions give you both a foundation to build the scenario and more juicy details to exploit during the game. Encourage the players not to rush through these questions - things go to hell the minute you land in the opening scene, so this is your only real chance to examine the main characters

without a gun, literal or figurative, to their head. Probably spend around fifteen to thirty minutes of your playtime on this section.

Once you've answered all these questions together, the GM will come up with an idea for the horror and an opening scene. Unless the GM has an idea they're particularly excited about, now is a good time to take a five minute break to allow the GM to come up with something. Keep the horror's identity and description a secret from the players at the beginning of the game to enhance the tension. The reveal should happen when their characters discover what or who is pursuing them.

CREATING THE HORROR

One of the few things in *Quietus* that is *exclusively* the GM's responsibility is creating the horror. The horror, wherever possible, should come as a surprise to both the characters and the players. The unknown makes every decision uneasy, and making the players and characters uneasy or even outright scared (within the boundaries of the safety tools we discuss on page 30) is part of the game.

However, you're not going in completely blind. Everything the players came up with during character creation will point you towards the sort of horrific content they want to see in the fiction. Build on that, and think of the sort of villain that would turn up in the movie version of your game.

If the players want to be in some isolated woodland trail, that brings to mind rural serial killers, backwoods cults, and primeval forces that existed before humans.

Think *The Ritual*, *True Detective*, *Resolution*. If the game takes place in the dilapidated family home, the players are signalling that they want to bring in some aspect of their past. Think *The Haunting of Hill House*, *Oculus*, and the scenario *Testament* on page 86.

Use everything the players give you to build your horror, both at character creation and during play. If the character is a ruthless business man who's just laid off a bunch of staff, perhaps an aggrieved employee targets them - though, in my experience, ruthless businessmen usually *are* the horror.

There's nothing wrong with going as simple as possible. More or less every location can support a motiveless killer *a la* Rutger Hauer's character in *The Hitcher*. Put a creepy mask on them to make them extra scary, and you've got *The Strangers*.

Using the scenarios for inspiration

If you're stuck for ideas, there are a couple of resources in this book that can help. First of all, have a skim of the scenarios included in *Thirteen Tragedies* on page 62. These are full scenarios that include the location, characters, backstory ideas, and importantly here: horrors. You can pick and choose what you want from the scenarios to use them how you will.

If there's a horror in one of the scenarios that speaks to you, or even better freaks you out, you can steal it wholesale and put it into your new scenario. You might need to modify the horror to make it fit neatly into your scenario. For example, the horror in *Primum Non Nocere* on page 82 is a trio of murderous doctors and the hospital's sapient and malevolent force that spurs them on.

If the players want to set the game in a hospital, you can just pluck the horror from *Primum Non Nocere* and use it. If not, let's take a look at why that particular horror is scary. There are really two horrors here, and an underlying theme that adds to the discomfort. Firstly, we have the doctors: they're people who are meant to help us - authority figures whose literal job it is to heal us. So anyone in a similar position of authority and presumed trust could be your villain here: teachers, priests or nuns, police officers, counsellors at a summer camp. In short, anyone who has power in a situation where you're vulnerable.

Then there's the hospital itself, and what's scary about that is the idea that places in and of themselves have power and can influence the people around them. There's several scary elements here: firstly, it's something outside the belief system of science and most religions. So it's an alien and therefore discomfoting idea, particularly as the hospital has a human level of intelligence, and we like to think of ourselves as the smartest things on the planet. Also, if the hospital can influence the doctors' thoughts, what's to stop it influencing our thoughts too? The loss of agency and the idea that our thoughts may not be our own is part of what makes the psychological abuse of gaslighting - where someone tries to convince you that you're going mad - so terrifying. We tie a lot of our sense of self to our inner lives - *I think, therefore I am* - and if we lose that, who are we?

As for the underlying theme, hospitals are fundamentally scary places, because you're never there when things are going well. So, you can translate this to other places where the very fact you're there means that something's gone wrong: prison, a strict boarding school, on the run in your car after a robbery gone sour.

You can take any or all of these elements and incorporate them into a scenario completely different from *Primum Non Nocere* while incorporating some of its themes. In fact, you can do the same with each of the scenarios in that chapter.

RANDOM TRAGEDIES

If either the players or the GM need a little help coming up with ideas for their characters' backstory or the horror, you can use the tables below to generate some quick inspiration. Roll two dice and compare the total to the tables below.

Player inspiration tables

These tables are helpful when coming up with main characters and scenarios at the start of the game. The first table suggests something that may have been tragically lost, the second the reason why. Use either or both as needed.

What was lost

2. Your parents
3. Your child
4. Your sibling
5. Your body
6. Your mind
7. Your home
8. Your career
9. Your childhood
10. Your love
11. Your dreams
12. Roll twice, rerolling further 12s, and combine the answers



How it was lost

2. Neglect
3. Addiction
4. An accident
5. A terrible choice
6. A sudden disappearance
7. A betrayal
8. A tragic misunderstanding
9. A string of bad luck
10. An illness
11. A breakdown
12. Roll twice, ignoring further 12s, and combine the answers

GM inspiration tables

The GM can use these tables to provide some starting point for the horror and what it wants. If you're using the second table, the horror's primary motivation should always be to kill the main characters.

Working the tables together

Here are some example rolls using movies from our filmography (page 90) to illustrate how you could the random results together.

Don't Look Now: The players roll a three followed by a four: The main characters' child was lost in an accident. This implies not only a dead child, but that the characters were the child's parents.

Martyrs: The players roll a nine, and the GM rolls a three: The main characters' childhood was lost to a perverse cult. Aside from the trials endured by the characters, which can come up in scar scenes, this also implies that the characters have known each other since childhood.

Nina Forever: The GM rolls an 11 followed by an eight: A restless and unforgiving spirit has become infatuated the main characters. This implies that the the unforgiving spirit is obsessed with one or both of the characters, and each option has different implications. If they're obsessed with one of the characters, they could be trying to murder and usurp the other; if they're obsessed with both characters, then they're otherwise trying to intrude in the characters' relationship, and things are likely to get even more complicated.

The horror

2. Murderous strangers
3. A perverse cult
4. A sinister object
5. A family curse
6. Something old, terrible, and unknowable
7. Possessing demons
8. A fragile barrier between this world and another
9. Creatures you pretend not to believe in
10. A character from an old story given life
11. A restless and unforgiving spirit
12. Roll twice, ignoring further 12s, and combine the answers

What it wants

2. Has taken something precious from you
3. Adopted you as its own
4. Left you the blame for its crimes
5. Blames you for a past wrongdoing
6. Wants something from you that you could never willingly give
7. Spared your life for a promise
8. Is infatuated with you
9. Is going to kill you tonight, for fun
10. Has been haunting you since birth
11. Is to blame for everything bad in your life
12. Roll twice, ignoring further 12s, and combine the answers

CHARACTER & SCENARIO CREATION

Oli, Paul, and Sabine are sitting down for a Quietus session, and are just getting onto character and scenario creation questions.

Oli: Okay, let's do some character creation. Characters are just generated through a series of questions. Some of them you'll answer together, and you can discuss those. Some of them you'll answer individually, particularly if it's about your character and your character alone, but feel free to get input from everybody else. So, the first question is: 'You're somewhere isolated. Where? Tell me about the place.'

Sabine: So, maybe we're hiking or something?

Paul: Yeah, I love that.

Oli: Hiking's good. Where are you hiking?

Paul: I quite like the idea of a forest, like a mountainous forest?

Oli: Okay, cool. Are we in Europe, are we in America?

Paul: I saw this film a couple of weeks ago called The Ritual, where a group of people go off hiking, I think somewhere in Scandinavia, through this massive forest.

Sabine: Cool.

Oli: Yeah, I'm up for that. That's exactly what came to mind when you said hiking. Okay, so we've already answered the next question, which is: 'Why are you in such an isolated place?'. But do you want to elaborate on it a bit? Why have you come hiking, why this particular place?

Sabine: I mean we could just be hiking for fun, or it could be some sort of challenge? Maybe someone said we couldn't do it, like you're too old, too young, too female, you're too whatever.

Oli: So you're doing it to prove a point? Paul, any thoughts you want to add to that?

Paul: Yeah, I don't know how you'd feel about this, Sabine. But I was thinking about whether our characters were a couple in some way? Maybe like a shared anniversary present or something?

Sabine: Or maybe we're doing it to get back together or grow closer after we were drifting apart?

Oli: Yeah, that's great. Well, the questions are obviously in the right order because the next question is: 'What is your relationship to each other?'. So how long have your characters been together, before things started to go awry?

Sabine: Are we definitely a romantic couple? Because I was thinking a family, like father and son or something like that? I don't know if that works for Paul because you said 'couple'.

Paul: Yeah... father-son... I quite like siblings.

Oli: Okay, yeah, so you're siblings and something's brought you back together recently after you'd drifted apart; the next question is: 'Why does being here pain you?' and something that's guaranteed to bring families back together, however briefly, is a death in the family. Does that sound okay?

Sabine: Yeah, I was thinking the same thing. Can we say it's our father who's died, or does anyone have any issues with that?

Paul: No, I'm okay with that.

Oli: Okay, so your Dad's died. His death has brought you back together, and you've decided to go off on this hiking trip.

Paul: So how about if our Dad was a really avid hiker, like this was his favourite route through this forest? And we're kind of doing it as almost a tribute to him.

Sabine: Yes, yes, I like that.

Oli: Okay, cool, but I want to go back to the 'to prove a point' thing. So maybe you've never done this before because your Dad didn't think that you could? Or there was one of you in particular that he didn't think was tough enough to go through with it?

Sabine: Yeah, maybe like even the other sibling thinks secretly that, 'You're an urban lawyer, is this too hard for you.' And the other guy was like, 'No, no, I can do it for Dad, I've won all these cases, I'm not afraid of anything.'

Oli: Okay, cool. So the next question is: 'What is your name, and what do you look like?'. So that's one for you each.

Paul: So Sabine, where are we going to be from?

Sabine: I've just chosen the name Martin, which leaves it kind of open, because you can be called Martin just about anywhere. Shall we be from the UK?

Paul: Sounds good. I'm going to be 'Sarah'.

Oli: Paul, tell me more about Sarah, what's her deal?

Paul: Sarah was always kind of the black sheep of the family. I imagine she was the youngest. Her father was a very practical man, and she sort of rebelled against him. Maybe she went away to art college, and refused to get, like, a proper job. All of her life he's, like, really disapproved of all of her life choices.

Oli: And Sabine, what about Martin?

Sabine: I guess Martin is the eldest son, and he has always tried to impress his father by being very successful. I think he's a lawyer in the city, and he's got everything pretty much together. But he's always tried to impress his father, and a lot of times he's tried too hard.

Oli: Okay, next question is: 'Something went wrong yesterday, what was it?'



Paul: I like maybe our tent got ruined... or maybe it's something more obvious, maybe we got lost.

Sabine: Yeah I like the getting lost, I think maybe one of our power packs that we use for a GPS tracker just died, and now we're standing there in the middle of the valley with no idea where to go.

Oli: Yeah, the two of you standing there trying to figure out how to hike with an actual map. Do you even have a compass?

Sabine: Maybe a cell phone? But if we don't have any power packs, then that's probably no good either?

Oli: Sabine, you mentioned being the eldest. Are there other siblings?

Paul: Yeah, I like the idea that we've got another sibling, who for some reason is not on this trip.

Oli: Ah, well, the next question coming up is: 'There should be someone else nearby, but there isn't. Where are they?'. So that plays into that quite nicely.

Paul: I like the idea that he was meant to meet us at the start of the hike and just never turned up?

Oli: Or did he go off on his own for some reason, and you had to follow him, and that's why you got lost?

Paul: I like that. But what if we all started the hike together, we got lost last night, and when we woke up in the morning he just wasn't there? Tent and everything gone?

Sabine: Yeah, that's cool. That's very cool.

Oli: Okay! And the last question is for both of you individually, and you can answer it either in character or as yourself, depending on how comfortable you feel: 'What are you most afraid of?'

Sabine: For Martin, I think it's being seen as a failure.

Oli: And Paul, what about Sarah?

Paul: Um... being alone.



ALEX & JAY

WHATEVER ELSE HAD GONE WRONG IN HIS LIFE, WHOEVER HAD ABANDONED HIM - and there was plenty of both - Alex's shadow had always been there. He didn't see it as much now as he did when he was back in the system, or when he was on the streets, but he always knew it was just behind him, waiting. As a kid, he'd been terrified of it. 'He's scared of his own shadow,' the social workers would say. They would assume his foster family was beating him; it was usually a pretty safe bet, anyway.

When he was five years old, Alex's shadow had told him its name. That was just after it smashed his foster father's head onto the bare concrete floor of the garage where he took Alex at night. His skull had cracked on the fourth blow. It smelled like a butcher's shop afterwards. 'It's okay,' whispered Alex's shadow in his ear, 'I'm here. I'm always here. I'll always look after you. It's always me and you together.' And then it had told Alex its name.

Alex was as close to composure as he came when he met Jay in the corner shop when they both were out late at night to buy milk. Alex had a job - minimum wage with terrible shifts, but a job - and had managed to avoid alienating the friends he'd made in the past couple of years enough to sofa surf reliably. His shadow hadn't whispered to him in over a year.

Jay was good looking, but not so much that Alex felt ugly or jealous around him. Jay was kind, and his smile was so genuine and warm it burnt a little. Alex asked him out. Jay said yes, and the warmth of his smile spread over Alex's whole body.

'No,' whispered the shadow.

'Please,' begged Alex quietly.

'No. Just us. Always just us,' it replied.





HOW TO RUN QUIETUS

THE GM'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The GM, it's fair to say, has more responsibilities than the players. The players' responsibility is to describe the actions of their characters, act out their dialogue, and roll dice - always remembering to play their character as if they were a real person. The GM has to manage *everything else*. It sounds like a lot, but it really breaks down to the following six points:

- ◇ Abide by the agendas and principles
- ◇ Describe the fiction
- ◇ Play the horror and the side characters
- ◇ Ask questions and use the answers
- ◇ Answer the players' questions honestly
- ◇ Judge when rolls are needed

Abide by the agendas and principles

Starting on page 53, this chapter details the agendas and principles in *Quietus*. The agenda is what you're trying to achieve, the principles are how you achieve it. They might seem like advice rather than rules, but they're just as important as rolling the dice or increasing a score.

Describe the fiction

Describing the fiction is the basis of all GMing. You describe everything that's happening in the fiction, except for the main characters' actions. If you don't describe it, it effectively doesn't exist in the fictional world.

So, think about the main characters in the scene and the world they inhabit. Imagine what's happening *right now*, and describe it like you're recounting a great movie to a friend. You don't need to describe everything in intricate detail - stick to what's relevant, and what's exciting. Think about how the scene looks, what the characters can see, what they can hear, what they can smell.

Don't play 'gotcha'. Remember, you're describing it like a movie scene, so it's okay to describe things to the players that their main characters don't notice, if it serves the agendas and principles. It's the players' responsibility to play their characters as if they're real people, so if you describe something that their character wouldn't be aware of, they can't react to it.

Play the horror and the side characters

When you're playing the side characters, play them like real people. The side characters are probably going to die, but they don't know that (and they certainly don't want that). Give each side character a name and a simple drive, and portray their actions as if they were real people.

The horror is different. They may or may not actually be a person, but they certainly don't act like most people you walk past in the street. For whatever reason you've come up with, their motivation and desire is to kill the main characters; everything else is secondary, including their own sense of self preservation. Play the horror more like a force of nature than a person, forever rolling forward like the truck in *Duel*.

Ask questions and use the answers

Just because you're responsible for describing the fiction, doesn't mean you need to make up everything yourself. Part of playing to find out what happens is explicitly not knowing everything and being curious. If you don't know something, or you don't have an idea, ask the players and use what they say.

Ask the players for input at any point, on any subject, to help you describe the fiction. 'What kind of wildlife do you think would be in this area?', and 'do you think there would be cell reception up here?' are examples of questions that help inform the fiction. Unless it goes against *Quietus*' agendas and principles, you should accept the answer. If something doesn't quite fit with the game's tone, ask clarifying questions or reframe the question until it does.

Questions about the main characters

If you want to know something about a main character, ask their player. Don't arbitrarily declare facts about the main characters: they're the only part of the game that isn't your domain. It's fine to make suggestions, but the players get final say over their main character.

Leading questions

While you can't declare facts about a main character, you can (and should) ask leading questions to help you describe the fiction and deliver on your agendas and principles. 'How long has it been since you slept?' is an open question, but it implies the main character is low on sleep and will get the player thinking in those terms. Asking a player 'when was the last time you felt pain like this?' after their character has been stabbed leaves them free to answer the question, but implies that they have felt pain like this before.

Painting the scene

You can also ask players questions that give input into a scene's mood and tension. These sorts of questions take the form of asking players to contribute details from a prompt. Example painting the scene questions could include: 'what about the man staring at you from the driveway lets you know he is utterly insane?' or 'what about the ruined building tells you that it used to be a place of love?'

The most important question

The most important question is 'what do you do?'. A game of *Quietus* is a conversation - you get to describe a lot as the GM, but you're not here to monologue.

The point of your descriptions is to see how the characters react. So, after you describe the results of every dice roll, after you spend dread and introduce a consequence, or whenever following the fiction puts a new obstacle in front of the characters, ask the players, 'what do you do?'

Answer the players' questions honestly

Questions are a two way street. The players will likely have questions for you too during the game. You can expect questions that: help the players set up their reactions ('do I think I could make it to the car before the killer catches me?'); give information about side characters or the horror; or clarify and expand on what you've already described ('so it's full of animal carcasses in here. What does it smell like?')

Remember, you only have to answer within the realm of what the characters could know. If they ask you why the horror is trying to kill them, it's perfectly reasonable for you not to provide an explanation. Of course, the player could also have their main character ask the horror directly in the fiction. Though that may not be sensible, and the horror may just shrug and say, 'Why not?' If the answer to a player's question is ever a 'maybe?', then it's probably time for a roll.

Judge when rolls are needed

The GM judges when to move from the conversation to rolling the dice, but take your cues on when to do so from the players. If a player wants something, or wants their character to achieve something, go by this

simple rule: say yes, or call for a roll. As per the rules for rolling dice on page 18, the players shouldn't roll for trivial matters.

Take the present fiction into account when determining if you need a roll and, if you do, the roll's tension level. If a character is trying to unlock a door with no outside influences, that doesn't warrant a roll - but if a character is fumbling with a set of keys, while the horror stalks towards them, that's at least a tense roll. If you're having trouble deciding on the tension level, imagine the movie version of the game in your head. How loud are the violins or discordant synths on the soundtrack right now? The louder and scratchier those imaginary strings are, the higher the tension level. Also, the tension levels use natural language - does the situation seem uneasy, tense, or desperate to you? If it's none of the above, you probably shouldn't call for a roll.

If a player feels the tension is too high or too low - perhaps because they or the GM misunderstood something in the fiction - the player and the GM can negotiate the fiction to a different tension level.

This isn't always a case of the player character 'gaming' to improve their character's chance of surviving. Players can suggest the tension level be raised if they think it's appropriate to the fiction - you're playing to tell a good story, not to make sure that your character survives. The important thing is that no action is set in the fiction until the dice are rolled.

ANATOMY OF A SESSION

Safety briefing

First, go through the CATS process (described in more detail on page 31). Highlight that *Quietus* is a game of tragic horror, and that there will likely be some graphic violence, terrifying imagery, and emotional scenes during scars.

Your CATS should cover the game's tone: all the players should embrace a combination of maudlin and desperate. If everyone abides by the principle that they should play their characters like real people, this shouldn't be a problem. Remind the players to keep you on track if you start tonally drifting, too.

Segue into describing the X-card as detailed on page 32. Tie it into your CATS briefing by telling the players that the X-card can be used to edit out content that they don't want to engage with for any reason: because they find it too disturbing or triggering, or because it doesn't fit with *Quietus*' melancholy horror.

Finally, introduce the open door policy as detailed on page 33. Remind the players that any player - the GM included - can leave if the game becomes too uncomfortable for them, or if they're simply not enjoying it. One to two hours is a long time to sit through something that isn't for you.

These are the bare minimum safety tools for running a game of *Quietus*. Feel free to use others if you would like.

Rules briefing

Provide the players with a brief description of the rules. Make sure you cover the following points:

- ◇ The scores: hope, despair, anxiety & dread
- ◇ Rolling dice
- ◇ Tension levels
- ◇ Panicking
- ◇ Scars

Three act structure in Quietus

A session of *Quietus* follows the same three act structure as the tragic horror movies that inspired it:

- ◇ Act I, where we meet the main characters and learn about their situation and relationship to each other. Usually lasts about half an hour.
- ◇ Act II, where they face a problem and work against it. This usually lasts about an hour, and about midway through something will happen that means there's no going back for the characters - either literally or metaphorically.
- ◇ Act III, where the action reaches a climax. The main characters either resolve the problem or are defeated by it. This usually lasts about half an hour.

Quietus breaks down play into that same structure.

Act I: Character & scenario creation

The character and scenario creation process (detailed on page 46) is very much a part of your play experience. As soon as you sit down and start asking the list of questions, you're in your game of *Quietus*, and you're also in the first act of your story. Act one should likewise cover what a movie would cover in the opening act: who the characters are, their relationship to each other, their situation, and where they are.

Guide the players through the character and scenario creation process. The rules on page 46 go into more detail on this, but the short version is: get full and interesting answers to all the listed questions, and ask lots of other questions too..

Remember, you and the other players can X-card any content that is triggering, boring, or just doesn't fit the game's tone. Now is a great time to do so, as players won't be worried about ruining the game's flow, and it will encourage everyone to use it later.

By the end of act one, you should feel like you know the characters well enough to have real interest in the rest of their story; and if you don't yet, keep asking questions that build on the players' existing answers until you do. The end of act one a good time to take a short break. It gives everyone a chance to grab a drink, and you time to create the horror - there's more information and advice on how to do that on page 37.

Act II: Opening scene

Act two is where you and the players will jump into the conversation proper. You describe the scenes surrounding the main characters, ask the players questions, and react to their answers. You play any side characters and the horror; the players portray their characters like real people, push forward with rolls, and reveal scars.

The opening scene should begin roughly at the end of act one in a movie: when things start to go wrong. Leap straight in with something off, something unsettling, or something downright bad. The least risky tension roll is Uneasy, and that's both mechanically and literally. Things should be, at best, uneasy.

Some example from past games of *Quietus* include:

- ◇ Two siblings on a hiking trip to honour their recently deceased father find that their other brother is missing from their camp.
- ◇ Two colleagues (one of who made an unsuccessful pass at the other the night before) arrive to set up a team building event at an out of the way cabin, but find it already unlocked with somebody moving about upstairs.
- ◇ The boat that was meant to pick up a newly - and unhappily - married couple from the tiny and supposedly uninhabited island was due to pick them up two hours ago... but never showed.

Act II: The downward spiral

From there, keep on pushing. Remember and live by the agendas and principles from page 53 - especially "be relentless" (page 55). The *Quietus* mechanics don't allow the players' scores to reduce, they can only get higher (and often, worse). Reflect this constant build in your session.

After your opening scene, let every following scene flow from the fiction and the mechanics. Consider everything that's happened so far when deciding what happens next - the nature and motivations of the horror, the players' actions and reactions so far, and the story elements and side characters.

When deciding what happens next, also remember the rules and the scores. Main characters *cannot* die until their despair reaches five. They also can't escape from or defeat the horror until their hope reaches five.

Push the players to make rolls during scenes. You can only call for a roll when a player describes their character doing something challenging or potentially dangerous (see the rules on page 21). You can't arbitrarily ask for rolls just because you feel like it, so it's your job to constantly put them in situations where they *have* to describe the sort of action that calls for a roll - the constant, relentless horror is your tool to do that.

Act III: The climax

Once either the hope score or one or more main characters' despair score is at four, you're in the final couple of scenes. Start pressing even harder with the horror's attacks.

Nothing is safe at this climactic stage of the fiction. The game is coming to a close, and somebody is probably going to die - be it the main characters or the horror.

The game's mechanics are tuned so that, as often as possible, hope and at least one character's despair will both be at four at the same time. This pacing brings everything down to one final, thrilling die roll. Aim for this outcome (within the rules), using your dread points to keep despair and hope neck-a-neck. However, do remember that you can't spend dread to kill a character.

Make any main character death a big moment in the story. Remember, this is a tragedy, not a slasher movie. Gore isn't necessarily a bad thing - the ending of *Inside* is horrifically bloody - but it can become cheap or funny if it's overused. Focus instead on the horror of what's happening, on the loss that the surviving characters feel, on the tragedy of it all.

Similarly, if the horror is a human or other living creature, make its defeat feel like a qualified triumph. The reality of killing a living being is horrific, bloody, difficult, and painful, even if they were trying to kill you. Don't let anybody get away easy.

Act III: Epilogues

After the game's climax concludes, finish with an epilogue. For each of these conditions that is true, you and the players will describe a short scene together as highlighted below.

If all the main characters died

Describe some side characters - either ones previously introduced during the game or invented exclusively for this epilogue - discovering the aftermath of the horror's attack. The players should describe something personal about their characters that lingers behind.

If one of the main characters died and the other survived

The player of the deceased character should narrate a short scene that reminds the surviving character of the dead character - this can either be in a flashback with both of the characters, or after the fact. The player of the surviving character should extend the scene by describing how their character is changed by the loss, and how they mourn.

If all of the main characters survived

If there was only one main character, ask them to describe how they've been traumatised by harrowing events, and how that's changed them some weeks or months later.

If there were two main characters, have both players answer that question about their character. Then ask each of them to describe how their relationship to and feelings about the other character have changed.

If the main characters escaped the horror without defeating it

The players and the GM should each describe one very short scene that shows how the horror is still at large, and that in escaping without entirely defeating it, others are doomed to repeat their fate.

If the main characters killed a living horror

If the horror was a living, natural being, human, or animal, ask the player of any surviving main characters how they're changed by becoming a killer themselves.

If the main characters defeated the horror without killing it

Ask the player of each surviving main character how their life is affected by knowing the horror could still be out there, albeit in a weakened or captive state. Then narrate a short scene that hints at the horror's future return.

Decompress

Quietus can be a tense and emotionally draining experience, so take time at the end of your session to talk it over, or just to talk about something that isn't horrific or sad. Once everyone is back down to Earth, the session is over. Thank everyone for playing, and from us, thank you for playing.

YOU'RE NOT RID OF ME
YEAH, YOU'RE NOT RID OF ME
I'LL MAKE YOU LICK MY INJURIES
RID OF ME
PJ HARVEY

AGENDA

Your agenda sets out what you should be aiming to achieve when playing *Quietus*. Whenever you're describing the scene, the killer's actions, or speaking as the side characters, always ask yourself if you're achieving the agenda. If you're not, switch it up until you are. Always work toward this four point agenda:

- ◇ Make the world feel real, but terrifying
- ◇ Fill the characters lives with tension, melancholy, and horror
- ◇ Play to find out what happens
- ◇ Terrify the players, but respect boundaries

Make the world feel real, but terrifying

Make the world feel real. Portray the side characters like real people. Throw in references to pop culture, and describe the situation and the world around the characters in your own terms. *Quietus* takes place in our world - it's not on a space station, or a forgotten dungeon, or a haunted castle. Even scenarios outside of many people's usual experience - for example, an Arctic research station - might feel too detached from reality, and hence less scary.

The horror is an invasion into this real world. They're here to kill the characters, and that's a massive upheaval of the status quo. Everywhere the horror goes, leave chaos in their wake. Make them terrifying and utterly relentless. Nothing is sacred to the horror, no side character unkillable, no hope that they can't crush. Play the horror like a shark that's smelled blood.

Fill the characters' lives with tension, melancholy, and horror

The three themes you should really drive home are tension, melancholy, and horror. Think about how you can bring in at least one of these three themes when describing the world, playing side characters and the horror, and asking questions of the players. The players will instinctively follow your lead on tone, so reinforce these three themes in everything you say to get them playing along too.

Make the players' situation terrifying - throw in evidence of the horror's past crimes, make the horror relentless and merciless. Even before the horror shows up, describe everything in the creepiest way possible. Use all of your senses when describing scenes - the close humidity that hits you as you enter the killer's lair, the basement in the picturesque house that stinks like an abattoir, the feel of the knife against your skin, the slow creaking above you that could be the house settling or could be footsteps upstairs.

Make every roll tense - have obvious and bad consequences lined up for every failed roll. If the players see that potential hurt is coming their way every time they pick up the dice, it'll be a moment of trepidation and dread.

Players often forget they can introduce side characters and elements by revealing a scar to get a bonus die, so remind them before they roll; much of the game is about these tragic backstories.

Play to find out what happens

Play to find out if the characters can survive, what they are prepared to do to survive, and to uncover the sad truths of their past. Don't pre-plan the story before you play *Quietus*. The rules will fight you if you try. Absolutely do not decide up front if the horror or the players will die. The players' choices and the dice results will determine the outcome.

You can have an idea for the horror prepared ahead, but be open to changing your ideas based on character creation - especially 'what are you most afraid of'.

Terrify the players, but respect boundaries

The characters in a game of *Quietus* will inevitably be frightened - they're being chased by someone or something that wants to murder them. Your job as the GM is to scare the *players*. Use horrific descriptions, the horror's relentlessness, and the uncertainty inevitable in dice rolls to amp up the tension and fear wherever possible.

That said, respect boundaries. *Quietus* is at heart a game, and games should be fun. See page 30 for advice on using safety tools to create a supportive environment so everyone has fun.

PRINCIPLES

The principles are:

- ◇ Leap straight in
- ◇ Be relentless
- ◇ Be a fan of the characters, but be merciless
- ◇ Embrace simple horrors
- ◇ Begin and end with the fiction...
- ◇ ...but respect the rules
- ◇ Make rolls matter
- ◇ Address the characters, not the players
- ◇ Make side characters real
- ◇ Keep the horror's motivation simple

Principles are in-the-moment guidelines to achieve your agenda. Whenever you're describing a scene or reacting to the players' actions, think in terms of these principles and the fiction you're telling.

Check to see if your ideas line up with these principles, and if they do, go with it. If they don't - yet - consider how these principles could shape and mould your idea into one that suits *Quietus*.

Leap straight in

There's a maxim in screenwriting: arrive late, leave early. Apply that to your games of *Quietus*. Don't open with an extended prologue of the characters going about their normal day before the horror attacks. You already covered that exposition and opening setup in

character creation. *Quietus* is a short game, usually running between an hour and two hours - make the best use of that time.

Start immediately with tense and unsettling fiction: You're awoken by someone knocking on your front door at 3 in the morning. You have to brake as you're driving down a deserted trail because someone's placed a mannequin in the middle of the road. Immediately throw the characters into the action, and guide the players into making rolls to get the fiction moving.

Be relentless

Keep the pace up constantly. The tension should always build, it should never decrease. Don't allow for pauses where the characters have downtime or a chance to relax. Once the horror sets their sights on the main characters - which as per the above principle, should be more or less immediately - they don't let up until the main characters are dead or have absolutely escaped.

The threat should always be present, even if only as an overarching sense of dread and foreboding. Everything should lead on from what's gone before, and should constantly be escalating in tension and violence.

For example, if the characters encounter the horror on a road trip, the horror could initially follow them in a car attempting to flag them down. However, things start to take a turn when the horror attempts to run them off the road, which turns into a chase, which turns into a car crash, which turns into trying to escape the car wreckage before the horror reaches them, which turns into a desperate fight with the horror.

Be a fan of the characters, but be merciless

This isn't the story of the side characters that you play, or even the story of the horror. This is the story of the main characters. You and the players are all here to tell their story. But. This is a horror game. Being a fan of the characters doesn't mean coddling them or giving them an out. They're in a terrible situation, and they're stuck there until they claw their way out. It's your job to push them *to* claw their way out.

Being a fan of the characters means keeping the story focused on them. Use the content from character creation and the elements introduced through scars to make the fiction about their lives. Push for more scars so you can learn more about the main characters. Make it a story that could only happen for them.

Embrace simple horrors

Horror has some of the most well known tropes of any genre. The cabin in the woods. The masked killer. The car that won't start. Don't be afraid of the tropes; use the tropes to create fear. Go for what's scary, even if it might seem obvious.

If you're stuck for a description of the horror, a guy with a knife and a bag over his head with loose eyeholes torn in it will always be scary - because what sort of person would wear a bag over their head? If a player is hiding in a closet, you could spend dread to place the body of one of the previous victims in there with them. Draw on a century of scary movies, and be brazen about it.

Begin and end with the fiction...

The fiction will tell you when to engage the rules, the rules will tell what to do next in the fiction. Neither of them works apart from the other.

For example: If a character is attempting to jump from a balcony to escape the horror, that should require a desperate roll to see how that goes - and the possibility of one hope for escaping the horror. If they roll a 6, reward 1 hope, and then return to the fiction: they land without hurting themselves and create distance between them and the horror. If they roll a 4 or 5, they land badly and break a leg, a serious consequence. All future narration from both you and the player has to factor in that broken leg; but don't forget to award that hope as well. If they roll a 1 - 3, the horror catches them before they leap. Raise their despair by 1. They can't die if their despair is less than 5, so we return to the fiction with the horror dragging them away from the balcony and back into the house, kicking and screaming. Ask the player what they do next. The rules and the fiction will always bounce off each other.

...but respect the rules

Telling good fiction is the point of the game, but the rules give it structure. If you fudge the rules, the fiction loses its integrity and will collapse. Being honest with the despair, anxiety, and hope scores are crucial to running a good game, as they inform how the fiction plays out. A main character *cannot* die until their despair is at five, and *cannot* escape or defeat the horror until their hope is five.

The rules don't overrule the fiction; they inform it. Horror is full of false hope where it looks like the protagonists have escaped or defeated the horror, only to be drawn back in.

Also, you're the GM, and you've got narrative input over most of the world and what happens in it. So until the scores are at the right level, don't narrate anything that can't be taken back. BUT - this doesn't mean go easy on the characters. You have to be merciless and relentless, remember. If the dice come up badly, characters can get shot, stabbed, strangled, and thrown off roof tops - but until their despair is at five, they just can't *die*.

Make rolls matter

Rolls are your primary way of pacing the game and building tension. Whenever you ask for a roll, make sure it's clear what the player is trying to achieve, and have clear consequences lined up should they fail. If the consequences are clear before the roll, it won't seem like bullshit when they're inflicted after a failed roll.

Also, don't cheap out on the players if they roll well. Players trust a GM that rewards success and inflicts consequences fairly. It also makes every dice roll matter, since the result carries real opportunity but also real risk.

For example, one of the main characters is wrestling the killer's hunting knife away from them. That sounds pretty desperate, so it's a desperate roll. However, if they succeed, they should expect a point of hope - the main character disarmed the killer and now has their weapon.

Agree this with the player before the roll. However, it's a desperate roll, and they're fighting with someone who wants to kill them.

If they fail the roll, the consequence that follows is absolutely a stab wound at least; if their despair is already at 4, it absolutely makes sense for them to be stabbed fatally.

Address the characters, not the players

Avoid saying, 'Tylor, what is Steve doing? His car won't start and the killer is stalking towards him.' Instead say, 'Steve, the car won't start, and the killer's stalking towards you. What do you do?' Speaking to the main character, not the player, keeps the game focused on the fiction. It's important for the game's flow, too. If you talk to the players, you might omit important details that factor into dice rolls and the tension level.

Make side characters real

Make the side characters seem like real people. Give them a name and a simple motivation. Side characters will help the main characters for the most part. However, much like the main characters, they're probably not happy about the present situation either. If it's reasonable within the fiction to say they can't or won't help, stick to that truth.

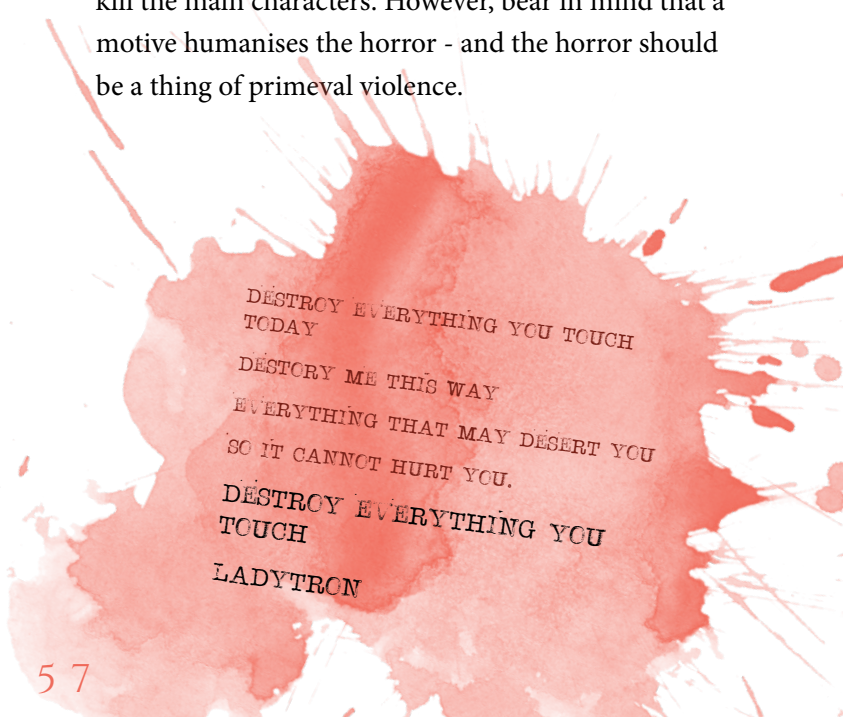
With all side characters, put yourself in their shoes: what would you do if someone was battering on your door, screaming that someone was trying to kill them? You'd want to help, but you might also think it was a trick or a prank. You might call the police instead of letting them inside.

Playing the side characters as real people with goals, agendas, and lives beyond the story will help the players care about them so they feel bad when they die. Yes, this is manipulative. This is a game about trying to scare the players and make them feel sad; it's all manipulative.

Keep the horror's motivations simple

The horror wants to kill the main characters. *Why* they want to do that isn't particularly important. Often in the horror movies that inspired *Quietus*, the killers are just doing it because they want to do it. In *The Strangers*, when asked 'Why are you doing this to us?', Dollface replies, 'Because you were home.'

Motiveless murder is frightening because you can't reason with it. Even if the horror has a motive beyond sadism, it doesn't change their drive: they are there to kill the main characters. However, bear in mind that a motive humanises the horror - and the horror should be a thing of primeval violence.



DESTROY EVERYTHING YOU TOUCH
TODAY
DESTROY ME THIS WAY
EVERYTHING THAT MAY DESERT YOU
SO IT CANNOT HURT YOU.
DESTROY EVERYTHING YOU
TOUCH
LADYTRON

INTERPRETING DICE ROLLS

Consequences

On mitigated successes and failed results, you'll often have to come up with consequences ranging in severity. Consequences are usually things that directly affect the character who made the roll, but they don't have to be.

Most of the time, the consequence and its severity will be apparent from the action that's being rolled for. If a main character attempts a jump from the roof, a consequence might be a twisted ankle, a severe consequence might be a broken leg or a limb impaled on a rusty rebar.

If they're gunning their car to get out a ditch, the consequence would be damage to the car. If they're calling for help on their phone, it runs out of battery.

Sometimes, a direct consequence won't be immediately apparent - that's okay. You can take dread instead (detailed below), or introduce a consequence that's not directly related to the roll. For example, if the main character is trying to flag down a passing car for help and fails, the car driver might turn out to be the killer's accomplice.

Remember, a consequence doesn't have to affect just the main character directly involved in the roll - the consequence can affect the other main character, any side characters, or any story elements. If a main character throws a Molotov cocktail at the killer and misses, it could instead start a fire that cuts off their route of escape. Consequences *must* be only two things: in line with the established fiction, and bad.

Hope

As the GM of a horror game, it's easy to forget that you must award hope when appropriate. You must raise the hope score when a player makes a roll that would help them escape from or defeat the horror and gets either a success *or* a mitigated success (i.e. the highest die in the pool is between 4 and 6).

But how do you spot a hopeful action? A couple of qualifiers on this. Firstly, not every action or roll stands a chance of raising the hope score. The roll must be specifically about defeating or permanently escaping the horror.



Most rolls will just advance the story as main characters deal with previous consequences, or try to stop things getting worse. Hiding from a masked killer while they search for you won't raise hope - sure, you won't get caught on a success, but you're still stuck in the house with a killer.

Hope often comes with a consequence attached. The hope score rises if the player succeeds or gets a mitigated success on the roll when trying to escape or defeat the horror - but they also get everything bad that comes with that roll. So, if a player rolls a mitigated success on a desperate roll, the hope score increases, but the character also suffers a severe consequence, and the GM gets two points of dread.

Despair

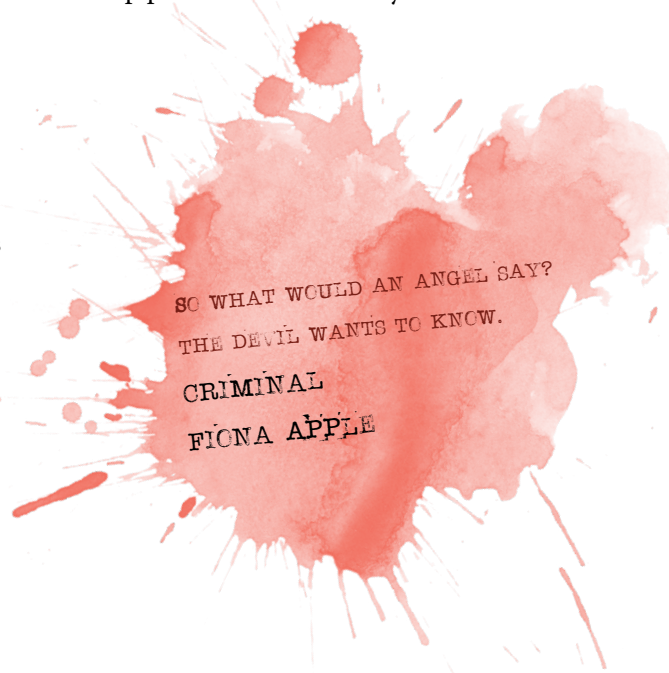
As the GM, you don't have a say over how despair increases on dice rolls. Either the player chooses to increase despair on certain results, or it happens automatically on severe failures. The rules for dice rolls and increasing despair are on page 21.

Dread

If you're not sure what consequence ought to follow from a roll, you can opt to take one or more points of dread instead. Dread is a resource you can spend to inflict consequences on characters and raise their dread (see page 18 on spending dread). Dread serves three purposes: building a sense of fear for the players, pacing, and reinforcing tone.

If you have a decent amount of dread, don't be afraid to take more when you next have the chance. Building up a pool of dread allows you to keep the main characters' despair and hope scores balanced. It's also rather anxiety inducing for players to see that growing pile, since they know it's going to come their way.

Nothing in a game of *Quietus* should feel comfortable or safe, and spending dread is your tool for maintaining that feeling. These roll-independent consequences help maintain *Quietus*' constant maudlin, desperate tone, as things can go wrong even when the characters try their hardest - phone batteries die, cars run out of gas, the cop you're running to for help panics and shoots at you.





HARDIK & ISHA

THEY MET LATE, LATER THAN THEY REALISED. SHE WROTE WONDERFUL NOVELS.

When they were in their forties, both on second marriages but feeling like kids again in each other's presence, she would read to him at night what she'd been working on that day. She'd always fall asleep first, manuscript papers collapsing on her chest. She knew how it was going to end, of course.

Two decades passed; that spark and that excitement had faded, as all things do. Their love was still there, softer around the edges, but there. Then the illness took her. Not all at once, not finally, but piece by piece, little bits of her mind drifting away like ash fluttering up from a bonfire. Now he would read to her in the evening, novels that she didn't remember writing. She no longer knew the end, though he did.

One evening, she sat up, eyes clear, speech lucid. Hardik started when she said his name; he more or less considered that he lived alone. 'Hardik, Hardik, when was the last time I wrote something? A novel, a collection even?'

He barely knew what to say, so he answered as simply as possible. 'It's been ten years, sweetheart.' The clarity in her eyes shifted to terror. 'No, no, no. One book every ten, or they'll come for me, they'll come for me.'

Hardik's heart ached. Not lucidity, then. Not a reprieve. Just a new madness. He tucked her in, kissed her on the forehead as she murmured that they were coming, and went downstairs.

As he passed the stairwell window, something caught his eye. There were five men standing in the garden. No, not men, exactly. Not quite.



THIRTEEN TRAGEDIES

HOW TO USE THESE SCENARIOS

This chapter contains 13 scenarios for *Quietus*, each with their own flavour of melancholy horror, written by some of the best RPG writers in the industry right now. These scenarios provide answers, either explicitly or implicitly, to the character and scenario generation questions found on page 34, and give the GM a horror. There are also some example scar scenes included, which give hypothetical instances of how the main characters could use scars to bring in elements and side characters.

There are three ways you can use these scenarios. You can use them whole-cloth, skipping the character and scenario generation section to jump straight into the first scene. This way, you can either let your players read the entire scenario, or give them sections pertinent to them while you keep the horror's details a secret for that extra element of dread.

You can also pick and choose parts of the scenario for inspiration. You could lift the horror, or a version of it adapted to your tastes and the fiction, and pit it against main characters created during character and scenario creation. You could grab the characters and location

and come up with your own horror, or mix and match the horror from one scenario and the characters from another.

All of the scenarios here are great examples of the kind of things that a *Quietus* session should include, so the third option is to use them as a source of inspiration: read them all, soak them up, and then remember the kind of elements that they included when you're coming up with your characters and horrors.



A KNOCK AT THE DOOR

by Nell Raban

Content warnings: cancer, domestic abuse, infertility, demonic possession

When Ruby Bernardo met Jun—William Libunao, Jr., he had seemed so nice. A charmer for sure, a real guwapo, but not like his friends. He was putting himself through architecture school, after all. A real, self-made Filipino-American immigrant like her and her family. So when he asked her to marry her, ‘yes’ was the only word that came to mind. They had Clara soon after. Jun worked hard, started his own firm. But despite his success, there was always something missing. He built them a beautiful house, which Ruby was expected to fill with the laughter of children.

Those children never came; after many failed attempts, Ruby experienced secondary infertility: the inability to bear more children. So Clara grew up an only child, and Jun became abusive, never satisfied with anything. Clara watched her parents’ marriage fester for years. When she came of age, she realized she didn’t have to put up with any of it any more, and left home. Clara stayed in touch with her mother, begged her to leave too, but Ruby refused; divorce is a sin.

Then Jun fell terminally ill with liver cancer. He had been diagnosed some time ago, but his condition rapidly deteriorated over the last month. Ruby stayed by his side, taking a leave of absence from her job to care for him. She called home Clara, too, who was a nurse now, hoping the family could reconcile things before it was too late.

The main characters

Ruby Libunao, 55, second-generation Filipino-American. A devout Catholic and highly superstitious. Ruby was an administrative assistant at the local high school (the one her daughter attended) until Jun fell ill. A lifelong victim of her husband’s abuse, she nevertheless stands by him, even as he lies on his deathbed. Ruby is so used to struggle, she doesn’t really recognize the strength she truly possesses.

Clara Libunao, 28, third-generation Filipino-American. A registered nurse whose life fell apart after a recent divorce. Her parents offered to help her with money, but she won’t accept it from her dad. Though raised Catholic, Clara has always been skeptical about religion, although she wouldn’t claim to be an out-and-out atheist. She’s come home after a decade away to care for her ailing father. But given her history with him, suffice it to say that she’s only here for her mother’s sake.

The location

The Libunao home looks like the kind of house an architect would build for himself. That’s because it is. An homage to brutalism, the house resembles a trio of mismatched concrete cinder blocks grouped together, with spacious glass cutouts for windows. The house stands on a generous plot of land in a well-to-do suburb, set back from the gate by a gently winding drive.

Despite its industrial appearance, Jun intended to raise a large family with Ruby in this house. But many of the rooms remain unfurnished, and the fact that only two people inhabit this space now is only made more apparent by the cold lifelessness of the grey concrete walls.

The horror

In some parts of the Philippines, tales are told of a trio of wanderers called the Kumakatok (lit. 'knocking'), who visit omens - normally of illness or death - upon families by rapping on their front doors. Two resemble old men, while the third appears to be a young woman. They don't speak, and they keep their gazes obscured.

The Kumakatok will knock at the beginning of the scenario, but will never enter the house. Instead, after a short while, they'll simply leave as ominously as they came. Horrifying though the tale of the Kumakatok may be, the real horror is upstairs in the sickroom. The devil himself has arrived, and he sees, hears, and speaks through his vessel, Jun. For whatever reason, he isn't finished tormenting Ruby and Clara, and has so much in store for them. Jun will enter a trance that will find him babbling violently and hysterically. But it won't be long before he gains clarity and strength, and rises from his bed.

Who's not there

Ruby is very well acquainted with her church's priest, Father Simon. She asked him to visit and pray with her for Jun's recovery. Unfortunately, he's returning from a visit to the Diocese and ran into car trouble on the road.

Were he by some miracle to arrive on the scene, he might be able to perform an emergency exorcism.

What went wrong yesterday

Clara arrived home just in time, as Ruby told her that Jun's condition had rapidly worsened. Clara noted that he's running a record-high fever, and Ruby claimed to hear him occasionally babbling incoherently. Clara did everything she could to make him comfortable, but she's taken a personal toll from seeing her father this way. She's been trying since then to remain calm and logical, and her mother, being how she is, isn't making that easy.

Example scar scenes

Trapped in the kitchen and desperate for a way to defend herself, Ruby's player remembers Jun humiliating her once during a dinner party. She ran into the kitchen crying and ashamed. She saw the knife block, and imagined what it would be like to kill him. Ruby prayed for forgiveness for the thought then, but now she reaches for the knife, knowing it might be her last hope.

Momentarily separated from her daughter, Ruby longs for help from a family member, someone like her older brother Vincent. Vincent was always there for her whenever there was trouble with Jun. When their parents died, he became the head of their family. An example of the kind of man Jun wasn't and never could be. Years ago, she gave her brother a set of house keys, including the front gate. Ruby prays that today he stops by to check on his sister.

A WRECKING

by Josh Fox

Content warnings: alcohol, substance abuse, murder

Fifteen years ago, your family scrambled onto the dark and rocky Cornish shore in lashing rain. You hurled yourselves into the heaving surf and battled your way to the wreck of the Hathersage, risking your lives to grab the payday of a lifetime. Enough to buy off your family's debts. Enough to get out of the endless, back-breaking, and increasingly futile drudgery of the failing copper mining industry. Enough to make a better life for yourselves.

You were only children, really. Boys on the cusp of manhood, at best. It was legitimate salvage, or so you thought. But there was one survivor of the wreck. A dying man. He wouldn't have lived, couldn't have lived. But as long as he made it to shore still breathing, that legitimate salvage is unlawful plunder. You did what you had to.

You buried the stuff you recovered. You couldn't risk selling it there and then. Anyway, it was tainted.

Now it's 1917, and your draft letters will arrive any day now. When they do, you'll be cast into the meat grinder. But with the money from the Hathersage, maybe you could change that. That's why you've rowed out to the island where you buried the loot.

Just one problem: there wasn't only one survivor from the Hathersage. Unbeknownst to you, someone else made it out. They saw what you did. And they've been biding their time, waiting to take their revenge.

Some questions for the players:

- ◇ What did you do with the dying man?
- ◇ What did you recover from the Hathersage?
- ◇ What will you do if you get the loot? Where will you go?

The main characters

George Bolitho. As the eldest son, George has always been expected to take up the mantle of foreman at the mine. But he can see all too clearly that mining is on the way out, and he hates the job anyway. He has long fantasised about leaving Cornwall for good, but couldn't face letting his father down, and he doesn't have any other skills. Lately his only relief has come from excessive drinking. His greatest fear is that he'll die alone, in a dark place.

Jamie Bolitho. Jamie is a bright boy, and last year was offered a scholarship at a fancy private school. His father initially seemed to accept he would be leaving, but found some excuse to stop him from going in the end. He fiercely resents the lost chance and nurses a grudge against his father, and against George for not interceding on his behalf. His greatest fear is that he'll never amount to anything.

The location

Longships, a chain of rocky islets off the Southwest tip of the Cornish coast. The islands are bleak and barren, and exposed to the ferocious elements.

At one end of the chain, the Longships lighthouse stands. The loot from the Hathersage is buried at the other end, out of sight of the lighthouse, on the islet of Tal-Y-Maen. The hiding place can only be reached at low tide.

The nearest land – currently concealed by the storm – is Land's End, just over a mile away.

The horror

Alice Hatcher was only twelve years old when she watched the Brewers board the wreck of the Hathersage and murder her father. Hiding just out of sight, their arrival sparked hope that swiftly turned to horror, pain, and fear. These last fifteen years she found herself a new home and a new family. She has gradually forgotten most of her old life. But she has never forgotten what the Bolithos did. She has watched them from afar, waiting for her chance at revenge. Now she's going to kill them – but not before she makes them confess.

Who's not there

Your father, Joseph Bolitho, has dominated your lives for as long as you can remember. He was your boss at the mine. He was the one who organised the mad dash for the goods of the Hathersage. He should be here with you, but instead he's in his bed, coughing up his lungs. Reaping the rewards of a lifetime in the mines.

What went wrong yesterday

When the Bolitho boys set out the weather was fair, but a violent storm descended as they arrived at the island. They couldn't reach the loot, and in fact came close to drowning in the attempt. Now they're huddled on the highest part of the island, trying to keep as warm and dry as they can, waiting out the storm – and the tide.

Example scar scenes

George recalls a boy named Billy who worked in the mines with him when he was a lad. The two of them were briefly friends and bunked off work together regularly. Billy got the sack, but George's father wouldn't sack him of course. Now Billy is working in the Longships lighthouse. George can have him show up, having spotted the brothers huddled on the rocks.

Jamie recalls a family visit to the rocks. It was a still, sunny day, and for once they didn't have to worry about work. The brothers found a sheltered cave where they threw stones into the surf, but the tide came in and they got trapped. Their father was furious. Now Jamie can use the cave as a hiding place.

George remembers getting drunk and getting into a fight at the local pub. He was beaten bloody by a thug named Mick Royal. The next day, he went and bought himself a knife, and he's kept it on him ever since. Now he can use the knife to defend himself on the island.

COUPLES' THERAPY

by Grant Howitt

Content warnings: drug use, abuse by a therapist, affairs, rape, animal death, abduction, murder

Alex and Mallory told their couples' therapist everything - anything to get their relationship back on track. But, try as they might, their marriage is coming apart. Lucas, their therapist, recommends a weekend away to a beautiful lakeside property where he's prepared a series of exercises to help them reunite as a couple. It's unorthodox, but they've both invested so much into the relationship, so they're willing to do whatever it takes. As the game begins, Alex and Mallory are being driven down twisting country roads in an incongruous limousine - Lucas insisted that they treat themselves, even though the car has problems reaching the property.

The main characters

Alex, a go-getting software developer whose startup was just purchased by a larger company. They still run the place, but micromanaging from the higher-ups is causing plenty of frustration and late nights. Alex had been quietly siphoning off funds from their startup prior to the acquisition. They're terrified that their new managers will find out and use it to kick them out of the business - but that's not enough to stop doing it. They have expensive tastes - a cocaine habit, upgrading their tech, and donating large amounts of money to Hecate01, a Twitch streamer they are helplessly in love with, hoping to receive validation.

Alex is smart, capable, and driven; their greatest fear is losing control of their mind, such as suffering irreparable brain damage.

Mallory, a personal trainer, is trying to get a good collection of clients before they break away from their employer and go freelance. As such, they spend a lot of evenings out of the house, and their attention is often elsewhere when they finally get to spend time with Alex. Mallory is sleeping with at least two of their clients on and off - Michael Stokes, a footballer who they're training up after a career-threatening leg injury, and Ellie Zhao, an instagram influencer with several lucrative product placement arrangements. Both of them are physically fitter and lead more exciting lives than Mallory. Mallory tells themselves the sex is simply part of their desire to make their own business, but there's more to it than that. They care deeply about both of the people they're having affairs with. Mallory is fit, enthusiastic and opportunistic; their greatest fear is that their career plan doesn't work out, and they'll be stuck working for someone else forever.

The location

A beautiful house by the side of a lake. On their therapist's recommendation, the couple have spent a sizeable chunk of money to come here for a weekend to put their marriage back together. Whilst there, they are to work through exercises the therapist has put in place to build trust in one another and reconnect as a couple.

While these exercises start out innocuous enough, they quickly become unsettling and perverse. In addition, Lucas has full control over the house, and has hidden things there to motivate the characters - evidence of their lies, their lovers bound and tied in the basement, a pistol loaded with blanks, and so on.

The horror

Lucas - the characters don't know his last name. It isn't on the website - has been the couple's therapist for the last nine months. Of all his clients, he thinks that Mallory and Alex have the potential for greatness - to make something beautiful together. He is aware of all of their secrets as they've confided in him during one-on-one sessions. He will use these secrets as blackmail, threatening to reveal them to the other person (or a third party, such as the characters' employers) should the characters go against his wishes.

He believes that, through a series of challenging exercises, he can reignite the love that they once shared - and still share, damnit - forging their union anew, stronger than before. He is completely obsessed with the idea that, no matter what, Mallory and Alex must stop lying to one another and become the happy, upstanding, well-to-do family that they should be. He doesn't want to out them to one another, but instead let them confess and overcome their shame.

He has prepared the house as best he could, which includes (but is not limited to):

- ◇ Filling the place with hidden cameras and microphones, so he can observe what's happening from outside
- ◇ Providing felt-tip pens in different colours that the couple use to write what they love about the other person on each other
- ◇ Getting one character to blindfold the other and lead them around the house or garden
- ◇ Hiding a bag of cocaine somewhere and ordering that the couple take some together
- ◇ Giving the couple masks that look weirdly like Hecate01 and Michael or Ellie, then ordering them to have sex wearing the masks
- ◇ Leaving a chicken in the back garden that the couple have to kill and eat as a bonding exercise
- ◇ Leaving a pistol loaded with blanks that the couple are to use to 'shoot' one another (at a safe-ish distance) to represent them leaving their old lives behind
- ◇ Abducting Michael, Ellie, or Hecate01, gagging and restraining them, and leaving them somewhere the characters won't immediately notice (the attic, under a tarp in the boathouse, in a crawlspace) with an eye to challenging the characters to kill them to free them from their past

Example scar scenes

Mallory's player narrates how they went running out in these woods with Ellie during one of their training sessions, and they had sex whilst hiding from passers-by. The GM tells Mallory's player to raise their anxiety score and to add an extra die any time they try to hide or keep quiet.

Alex's player narrates how, on the day they arrived, the house's caretaker (Bernard) helped them get to the property after the limousine got stuck on the winding roads. Bernard used to own the house, but had to sell it after making some bad decisions. The owner (Lucas) kept him on as help. Bernard gets frustrated at all these rich people coming into what he still considers to be his house. Alex can now bring the caretaker into the story to provide help on action rolls. However, after three rolls, he flips - either he's been blackmailed by Lucas into helping, or he's finally had it and gets angry.

Alex's player wants to see if they can figure out where the cameras are feeding video to. He describes a flashback where Alex use their computing proficiency to cover up their embezzlement from their employer, and the fact that they gave the embezzled money to a Twitch streamer from Mallory. The GM tells Alex's player to add a dice to any action where they use a computer.

Mallory's player narrates how, a few months ago, they realised that Michael's injury was healing really well - so well that he might not need them as a physical therapist any more.

Unwilling to lose a valuable client and the emotional connection they had built, Alex quietly instituted a regime of therapy that would slow Michael's recovery. The GM tells Mallory's player they can add a dice on rolls where Mallory lies to someone to get what they want.



THE FRUIT OF OUR LABOUR

by Hayley Gordon

Content warnings: Witchcraft, mob violence, poverty

1482, France. Javier Accart is a witch. The village has accused him. The village has sentenced him. He burns today, outside the church. And when he is naught but charred and smoking ash, then let God's judgment be visited upon his gluttonous family.

The main characters

Our main characters are the younger siblings of Javier Accart (35). Since their parents passed, the Accart siblings' fortunes have been inseparable from their farm. It is their home, their livelihood, and their older brother's greatest obsession.

The siblings may choose their first name (their last is Accart), their age, and their appearance. But they should remember that the Accart family is a proud family. A family far better than the peasant folk who surround them.

Names: Aalis, Ame, Amee, Amis, Cateline, Enguerrand, Estienne, Eudes, Garnier, Geoffroi, Gidie, Gosse, Guarin, Guiscard, Jehan, Jehanne, Johanne, Josse, Melisende, Onfroi, Piers, Roland, Roul, Vauquelin

The location

The Accart family have always lived here, on their large farm adjoining the village of Layeux. Layeux is far from other towns or cities. There is nothing but farming here. The village itself is no more than a church and a store of general wares.

Most of those who farm the lands near Layeux are poor, streaked with dirt, living in thatched households of but one room. The Accarts are far better than those desperate peasants. God has lifted their family from the mud - or so Javier says, and so his younger siblings may believe.

In years past, the Accart farmlands - like the farms that surround them - have only produced an average harvest. Then Javier turned his mind to improvements, ways of bettering the farm. In the last five years, the Accart fields have grown more and more bounteous with harvest. Yet the farms that surround the Accart lands have shrivelled and dried. Their harvest has worsened year after year, withered oats and barley barely rising from the ground. Has God granted the Accarts bounteous success, or is this the devil's false harvest?

Unknown to his siblings, Javier has secretly diverted an important Layeux river to the Accart fields. The river dips underground some miles from Layeux, providing irrigation to the farms in the area. Most of the farmers in the region are not aware of its existence. Javier discovered it when exploring the empty lands that border the Accart farm, and diverted it at a secret location upstream.

Carefully hidden in Javier's room are a map of the river and point of diversion, as well as his journal which states, 'God will not give the Accarts their due, and therefore I must take it from nature itself.'

With the success of his ‘improvements’, Javier expanded the Accart crops. New fields of pears and apples ring the older ones of oats, barley, and spelt. The wealth of the Accart family has grown and grown. At the same time, desperate farmers nearby have been forced to take work upon the Accart farmlands. Now, the harvest is underway. Farmers near Layeux work the Accart fields, for wages so poor they can barely eat.

The horror

The farmers surrounding Layeux are poor, hungry, and, so it seems, cursed. Their children eat nettles and weeds. Many farmers work the Accart lands, where the succulent crops of apples and pears grow around them. And yet they do not even earn enough to eat their fill. They are hungry and they will devour the Accart family. The farmers are hungry, vengeful, and deadly. But are they truly the horror here?

What went wrong yesterday

Yesterday, a mob of Layeux farmers, thin and angry, came to the Accart house and seized Javier. They said the Accarts had bargained with the devil. They said the devil had given bounties to the Accart lands and cursed their own. They said Javier was a witch, who taketh what God will not give him, and therefore they said Javier will burn. Then they took him away.

Who’s Not There

Javier employs a steward named Roul. Ordinarily, on this day of the month, Roul would go to the meeting place in front of the church to pay wages to the farmers who work the Accart fields. However, Roul has fled the town for fear of reprisal from the farmers.

Example scar scenes

The middle Accart sibling, Johanne, wants the church minister to take their side. She remembers herself and Javier having the minister over for an expensive dinner. One of the nearby farmers knocked on the door to ask for food for the children, and Johanne handed them the bones and offal discarded before the meal. The farmer leaves, and the minister expresses his approval at their charity. Johanne can now bring the minister into the story and appeal for help.

The youngest of the Accart siblings, Josse, wants somewhere secret to hide from the crowd. He remembers himself, Johanne, and Javier burying their mother beside their father in a small cemetery cut into the hillside. To protect their parents’ grave from wild animals in the area, they built a shelter with a roof that blends into the grass. Josse remembers shutting the door of the shelter, leaving his mother behind. He can now head to the shelter to hide.

Johanne wishes to bargain with the leader of the crowd, offering their family’s jewellery to convince the crowd to back down. Johanne remembers Javier buying her an engraved necklace for her birthday. She was shocked the family could afford such a luxury. But Javier assured her that they were doing well, and would continue to do well. Johanne pulls the gold necklace from her drawer, sick with self-disgust at the wealth that bought it.

HALLWAYS & EXITS

by Aura Belle

Content warnings: Troubled relationships, abduction

August and Reed officially became a couple via Facebook status in 2015, then welcomed one of August's co-worker, Tabitha, into their relationship in 2017. In the middle of 2018, they all moved in together and things ran smoothly, until three months ago when Reed got a job offer in Michigan, leaving the triad divided on how to progress.

The lease is up at the old place, which is cramped and small anyway, so the group moves into a new apartment in Spanish Halls on a one-year lease. Then, after a long discussion, they agree to have Reed visit Michigan and get the training in for nine months, after which time they'll visit for a month and decide if the final move is right for all of them. The separation is the first they've had, and everyone feels something new. The nights are long and strange considerations are coming to the forefront of everyone's minds - both August and Tabitha, living together alone now, both view each other differently. Half-conversations and things left unsaid pepper the nights in Spanish Halls.

On an unseasonably cold November night, the power flickers across the city. Strange light move over downtown, changing direction erratically, before settling over the apartment complex. A strange hum fogs the air and the shadows of something moving down the halls keeps everyone locked inside. Tabby and August have nowhere to go. All they have is each other.

The main characters

August is in her late twenties. She's a newly minted supervisor at a popular retail chain - it's not the most glamorous job she's had but it pays well, even if the stress isn't really worth it. She's been with Reed forever and Tabitha only recently, yet loves them both just the same. These past few months without Reed have felt almost alien to her, unfamiliar. Tabitha is here, but everyone isn't here, and she's just now learning how unprepared she is for that. She's trying to not let Tabitha see how awkward she feels around just her, and she's trying to process those feelings herself. She's feeling better about the move to Michigan each day, but still needs some convincing.

Tabitha is in her early twenties and works at a call center. The benefits are great and the pay is decent, but the hours are hit-or-miss. She's happy in the new relationship, but there's a sense of anxiety, a sense of feeling like the odd woman out, thanks to capital-D Depression and her own insecurities from past relationships. Secretly, Tabitha hopes that this small absence from Reed will allow her and August to bond better. She knows August has been feeling odd lately but doesn't know why, so is assuming the worst. Regarding the move, Tabitha doesn't want to leave Georgia at all and is trying to figure out what she wants to do, and her anxiety has kept her from vocalizing how she truly feels.

Location

Spanish Halls is an apartment complex in a busy city in Georgia - not the busiest, not your Atlantas or your Savannahs, smaller and more intimate, but still quite active - where the rent is high, and the humidity will destroy your spirit. The building is two stories tall and rectangular, a set of walls surrounding a central courtyard and mostly-clean pool. Four long, two-story hallways hold every apartment, and despite management's attempt to paint them and decorate with contemporary artwork, they still feel sterile and uninviting. The lights are usually not working in the north hallway and are in a constant state of repair, but the apartments themselves are quite nice.

A second courtyard and gazebo sit out front of the entrance next to the office and laundry facilities, and a road out back leads to a major highway. The interior courtyard and pool aren't so bad but could use some work. Management keeps saying they're installing a playground, but they've been saying that for years. The entire place feels more like a mid-tier hotel than anything, and that vibe carries through to Tabitha and August's hearts.

The horror

There are *things* moving through the city. They will abduct people violently, with incredible strength and speed. Several of these creatures prowl the grounds, hallways, and rooms of Spanish Halls, it's never quite clear how many. They have trouble sensing humans, mostly relying on sound. They can't appear to smell

anything, and the dim light seems to cause them trouble. They move quickly and can scale the walls, and in the dim light of the electricity-barren property, it's nearly impossible to notice them. If they grab you, it's almost certainly too late.

Example scar scenes

Tabitha and August have been separated in an escape from the creatures, and Tabitha's trying to keep calm while something outside scratches around. Though the place may be new, the feelings aren't. Tabitha can easily relate the feeling of abandonment and losing people not only with what's happening in the current relationship, but with many of her past relationships, but she always makes it through. Remembering that gives her strength.

Tabitha is lost in a section of Spanish Halls she hasn't been too before - all the corridors look the same, and one of the creatures is chasing her. She remembers moving from home to home growing up, place to place, never feeling settled. Everything is always new and strange to her, even people. She never feels grounded, never quite feels at home. But she always finds a way...

August is trying to come up with an escape plan. She thinks about the stress of managing a full-time job plus two full-time people with their full-time jobs, with the stress of moving, with the stress of a new place and new feelings and the awfulness of loneliness and obligation, with the stress of, well, aliens. Who knows. It's intense and she's always on the verge of meltdown, but manages not to be.

THE HAUNTING OF HAMMOND HALL

by *Brandon Leon-Gambetta*

Content warnings: alcohol, drug use

Twelve years ago was when it went down. It wasn't supposed to go like it did, but it did. Now Isabel and Kyle are back at Hammond Hall to pay respects. Looking back, that cold December weekend should have been great. Isabel, Kyle, and Andrew practically grew up together from grade school to the end of high school. Sure, there was crap that came up. They got in trouble, though there was never any harm in it. But they were real friends, the kinds you don't lose to time.

Nobody leaves this town anyway. Except Andrew got his shit together. He left for that fancy school in New York and disappeared for two years into academia and pre-law, while Isabel and Kyle went the 26 minutes to Western so they could get jobs back home.

Andrew visited once. One weekend. He came back home one time to slum it, and it should've been good. But drunk and maybe a little high in Hammond Hall, he fell over the railing. The student union was closed for a week for investigation and cleanup. It was supposed to just be a good time. Isabel and Kyle never really talked about what happened, but they also weren't questioned too hard by the police, even though they were there. These things happen.

Five years ago Hammond Hall closed when a local business donated a new student union. Twelve years later, Isabel and Kyle are back for their ten year reunion after graduation. Hammond Hall is just sitting there

closed and run down, keeping Andrew's memory. Drunk and maybe a little high, they go to pay respects.

The main characters

Isabel Cuevas, 33. Isabel got it together after the visit. She fixed her GPA, got a job she hates in the city, and works probably too many hours. People tell her she's successful, that her life is perfect, and she doesn't talk with her family any more. She wasn't going to go to the reunion, but Kyle reached out and pulled a bunch of manipulative crap about 'found family' and 'Andrew would want it' and 'the good old days.' She isn't afraid of Hammond Hall, but she's afraid she'll figure out who killed Andrew.

Kyle Sarno, 32. Kyle learned to push the visit down. He finished his degree in an extra year, but he's going to this reunion because it's where all his friends are. He's a production manager back home. It's good work, and it's close to his dad, so Kyle can look after him. Kyle is tired. He reached out to Isabel because he just wants a weekend where he can chill with friends and not be in charge of everyone around him. He's afraid of Hammond Hall, but Isabel wasn't interested in the visit until he mentioned Andrew, so he's going to make the best of it.

The location

Hammond Hall was an ugly building from the day it was built. It's big and impressive looking on the

outside, but the inside is two open floors of graffiti tagged walls, faded bulletin boards, and five years of rot. There was a dining hall you could look down on from the second floor of study spaces, and Isabel and Kyle know exactly which replaced section of carpet was where Andrew fell. When it was lit with fluorescent lights, it felt bright and welcoming at least. Without them, it becomes obvious that its only windows are on the now boarded up front doors. What it does have is dozens of mirrors, smudged with dust, many cracked, some broken, but all reflecting flashlight beams through the darkness. The largest is set on the ceiling, still whole as it was twelve years ago.

The horror

Andrew Darrell doesn't exist anymore. He fell, snapped his neck, and died reflected in the mirrors of Hammond Hall. Reflected in those mirrors, Isabel and Kyle came in and ate their breakfast, lunch, and dinner for another two years pretending Andrew hadn't died there. In those mirrors, Andrew's reflection lingered and mingled with their guilt, fear, and insistence that they don't mind coming back. Now a spectre of his face appears in the mirrors and every reflective surface. A dark form walks the halls through slivers of light with a long, jagged piece of glass clutched in its cold, pale hands. It hunts in this abandoned place not for vengeance (though it will take it), not for blood (though it will spill it), but to bring the truth into the abandoned hall. It is a creature of Isabel and Kyle's guilt, and it will not let them leave until that guilt is redeemed.

What Went Wrong Yesterday

Isabel arrived in town late and intends to earlier than she had said. Yesterday, she and Kyle grabbed coffee to talk about everything except Hammond Hall. Their conversation exploded when she realised that Kyle wasn't willing to go in before the reunion, and he realised that Isabel wasn't planning on staying after the reunion. They agreed to ditch the reunion early, even though they'd be dressed up and buzzed, but neither of them like it.

Example scar scenes

Kyle's player flashes back to college when he worked briefly in the dining hall and hated it. He remembers arguing with Isabel before going to work, cutting vegetables with his knuckles white from rage, and then snapping the knife as he drove it into the chopping board. He remembers hiding the snapped blade between the fryer and the grill to avoid getting fired, blood dripping from his hands. His anxiety score goes up by one, but he can take the knife and get an extra die on any roll where he uses it.

Isabel wants someone to come by Hammond Hall looking for her. She narrates the night of Andrew's death, and how she ran to the arms of her roommate Meg and told her everything. She can now bring Meg to Hammond Hall looking for her, since Meg knows Isabel won't keep away from her past. She'll give an extra die, but the spirit wearing Andrew's face isn't picky about who it kills.

HERITAGE

by Misha Bushyager

Content warnings: miscarriage, slavery, racism, gaslighting

It's only been a few weeks since the funeral that changed their lives forever, but Sam and Lex need to move on. At least, that's what Sam's mother kept telling Lex. So Sam and Lex drove south from their cozy New York City brownstone to the middle of nowhere Georgia for a vacation at Whitebourne Hall - a stately manor that has been in Sam's family for generations, but is now primarily rented out to southern belles who want a big plantation, Scarlett O'Hara wedding.

The caretaker, one of Sam's cousins, looked at them oddly when Lex walked in, but quickly pasted on a smile once Sam introduced himself. They were shown to the 'master's suite', a moniker that made Lex roll her eyes when she saw the nameplate despite her sadness.

The main characters

Lex Freeman, a tall black woman in her late thirties with waist length locs and a deep brown complexion. An architect, she's been married to Sam for about a decade. After years of fertility treatments and miscarriages, they have just lost their first and only child, a baby girl who only lived a few hours. She was aware of what she married into and put her foot down about not getting married at Whitebourne Hall, but was too grief stricken to object when her mother-in-law pushed the location on them as a getaway.

Sam Whitburn - a sandy haired white man in his early forties from an old southern family that migrated North (and changed their name slightly) in the roaring twenties. A math professor at the local community college, he agreed to come to Whitebourne Hall just to get his mother to stop nagging him about it. He doesn't quite understand his wife's dislike of the place. He's more upset about the loss of their little girl over any curiosity with Whitebourne Hall's history. It's just an old building, and his ancestors freed their slaves long before the war... at least that's what he's always been told.

The location

Whitebourne Hall - a sprawling neoclassical mansion with a wraparound porch supported by a colonnade. It's isolated, surrounded by an acre of manicured lawn then acres more of cotton fields. The interior is pure Old South with only the tiniest nods to modern life, like light switches and outlets. There's no Wi-Fi and barely any cell phone service. The kitchen is new, for the 1930s. Its sole phone is an older rotary dial style mounted on the wall. The bedrooms are large with high ceilings and enormous four poster beds hung with heavy draperies. The bathrooms are small and feature ancient claw foot tubs and rag rugs scattered on their polished wood floors. The only truly modern room is the laundry room, industrial machines capable of cleaning all the bedding in a few hours dominate the space.

The horror

Mary Louise Whitebourne - The eldest daughter of Colonel Jeremiah Whitebourne CSA and spinster who lived in Whitebourne Hall until her death in 1882. Not only did the Whitebournes not free their slaves before the war, they continued to treat them as slaves for years after as she ruled the plantation with an iron hand in her disabled father's stead. When their duplicity was finally discovered, there was a revolt that ended in their hanging by the incensed workers.

Jeremiah Jr. returned from gold mining out west to find the remains of his sister scattered all over. He buried all but her head, which he never found. Stories of her haunting the place sprang up shortly after he moved back into the Hall. The former enslaved people of the area couldn't spend more than a night in the place without 'accidents' happening to any who set foot inside, some fatal. It's continued for generations, only chasing away anyone black who dares to spend the night under her roof.

Who's not there

Lex's mother Alma was supposed to meet them there after she took care of a few things around her own home. She was also planning on packing away the nursery for them to save her daughter that heartache.

What went wrong yesterday

Lex went for a walk near the old creek that winds its way through the property. She'd been having a series of small accidents that she chalked up to not

paying attention or not getting enough sleep or being distracted. When she fell in the creek though, she swore she felt someone push her. Once in the water, it felt like someone was pulling her down. While looking for Lex, Sam heard the splashing. He pulled her out fairly quickly. However, he explained that the recent storm swelled the creek and caused bank erosion, which is why she fell.

Scar scenes

Sam's player narrates waking up from a nightmare when he was a child visiting the house. He remembers an older woman singing him an old lullaby as he fell back asleep. Sam's player can now use that lullaby to gain a die when he uses it.

Lex's player narrates a memory of Jennifer, the housekeeper here. Jennifer was kind to her after Jennifer's mother was rather cruel to Lex on her and Sam's wedding day. Jennifer can help with die rolls, but will likely pay for her 'betrayal'.

Sam's player narrates finding an old trunk in the attic as a child, full of old pictures and clothes, including a confederate uniform and a photo that bears a striking resemblance to present day Sam. He can use the uniform to help with die rolls, but that will probably only work once.

Lex's player narrates a memory of a summer spent with her grandmother in Glaban. She remembers her grandmother showing her how to properly hold a knife to butcher a chicken, and being sick shortly after she did it. She can use the butcher knife in the kitchen effectively once she finds it.

HOLES

by Alex Abou Karam

Content warnings: war

Malak and Khaldoun have lived in the same beige four story building since their marriage 50 years ago. During that time, the civil war came and left, miraculously leaving all of their seven children unharmed. It did leave behind bullet holes, so many that Malak stopped counting. In the 5 years since the war ended, most of the major damage was repaired or replaced - but the bullet holes are too minor a nuisance to address. Her children have moved on, but the holes remain, whispers of a painful past that never penetrated the safety of her home.

A day or two ago, while two of Malak's adult children were helping her move an ornate walnut bookshelf that's been in her home since before the war, she noticed a new bullet hole.

Nestled behind the massive bookshelf, inexplicably, she concluded the hole must've been there since before they moved in, they just never noticed it. Khaldoun brushed it off, insisting there had to be a simple explanation for it. The building was old, after all. Malak agreed, but the uneasiness persisted.

In the days since the banal incident, Malak noticed the bullet holes more. It feels as if they've begun to multiply on the building's facade, and have been appearing inside the home consistently: under a rug, by the doorbell, on the balcony. Khaldoun has noticed them too. Something's not right.

The main characters

Malak Nammoura, 56. She is an old lady who finds comfort in her routine. Daughter of a powerful merchant who was obsessed with climbing the ranks of the free-masons, she lived a spoiled but sheltered life and married young. Sharp-tongued, but always good natured, she loves her children dearly and dedicated her life to securing them all higher education and plentiful careers. Now that they've all moved on to start their own families, she feels the dreaded loneliness of her empty nest, and fills up her time with household chores, ladies' hookah get-togethers, and renovating her home.

Khaldoun Nammoura, 67. He is Malak's husband, a once prosperous dandy who, much like everyone else, lost it all in the war. He's quieter than Malak, but loves telling a story that ends in a good joke. Generally set in his patriarchal ways and small comforts, he seldom helps around the house. He spends most of his time watching the news or hanging out with his older brothers who live nearby. His open heart surgery left him sensitive to smoke, so he tries to leave the house every time Malak shares hookah with her friends.

The location

The Nammoura's cozy apartment is an old Lebanese home flush with the ornate old-school decorations and faded Persian carpets one would expect from a former upper middle class family. The lacquered wooden

furniture is old and heavy, the shelves laden with crystal bobbles, and the chandeliers intricate. Despite being old and dated, the home is kept spotless. The potent scent of tobacco permeates the sofas, cushions, and curtains in every corner of the house. The house has always felt cozy, lived in, and oddly alive.

The horror

The Price is an otherworldly force that inhabits the apartment and protects the Nammoura family. It is born of a blood pact the youngest Nammoura daughter, Houda, enacted at the beginning of the civil war to ward her family from harm, completely unbeknownst to them. She bound the home and every meaningful object in it to an otherworldly being who would protect the family living in it in return. The Price doesn't like people messing with its things. The wards also grew weaker as Malak and Khaldoun renovated the apartment. Getting rid of the old walnut bookshelf dealt it a fatal blow, and now the Price has started unbinding itself, inviting the horrors of war it once held back to claim the lives that were spared.

Who's not there

Malak and Khaldoun's children are conspicuously absent as this all unfolds, though most of them call or text to check in with their parents. Only Houda is completely silent, but her parents are so preoccupied with the bullet holes they don't notice at first. Houda heard about the bullet hole behind the bookshelf and decided to summon the Price to make sure nothing had gone awry. No one has been able to reach her since.

What went wrong yesterday

A high pitched whistling sound near the kitchen balcony ended in a deafening blast. Malak and Khaldoun awoke panicked and rushed to the kitchen, only to find it perfectly in order - apart from a fist-sized hole in the wall near the stove. Not another soul seemed to have been woken up by the commotion.

Example scar scenes

Malak remembers the one instance that damaged their home at the very beginning of the war. A stray bullet ricocheted off their balcony rails and embedded itself in the wall. Houda was the closest to the window when it happened and didn't speak for days after that, holing herself up in her bedroom with all her books. After she came back out, she had a look of determination on her face that would never leave. That was the last time any damage came to the house or the family until now. Malak's player can now call Houda for help.

A mortar shell barely missed their home and landed in the neighboring building, killing several people. The stark memory of his children screaming while the bombs fell raises Khaldoun's anxiety by 2, but he can now recall the object Houda held onto while they huddled, a journal. He can now acquire the journal from the girls' room and use it to gain an extra die on rolls that use the journal.

MIGHT DELETE LATER

by Kira Magrann

Jen and Zee love clubbing. They go out about three times a week to enjoy the local music, old school hip hop, and EDM nights. To them, clubbing isn't just about the music. It's an opportunity to express who they really are through movement, adornment, and connection with other people there. Clubbing is like their church, and they worship at the altar of ecstatic experience.

They love documenting their experiences on Insta, sharing videos of the two of them dancing and posing in their stylish fashions. Their pages are filled with selfies of bright neon and dark clubs. There's something that feels authentic about the selfies in their eyes, their expressions, and their body language. But the photos are unintentionally deceiving, only showcasing the best parts of their lives. Aesthetically, they use filters to flatter their skin, angles that focus on only their best sides. It's just how everybody takes club selfies. It's part of the culture to hide your flaws. To be perfect for the selfie.

The two friends got into a fight yesterday involving their club nights. Jen, out of a sense of feeling overwhelmed, wanted to cut back the amount of their nights out, and Zee, feeling abandoned, got angry. Jen caved and decided to keep the regular schedule which is what they're up to tonight. But while they were getting ready, they each took selfies that felt kind of... off somehow. They're hoping to shake it off on the dance floor.

The main characters

Jen, 25. Jen is skinny, short, with pale skin and short angular dark hair. Her style is all black punk rock jeans and boots. She's listless after quitting what she thought was her dream job in the toxic fashion industry. With little money in reserve, a recently failed relationship, and no idea what to do next, her anxiety is through the roof. Jen spends days trying to figure out the next step while managing all the feelings of being overwhelmed. Her biggest fear is that she'll never find a place she belongs.

Zee, 26. Zee is tall, curvy, with brown skin and long wavy dark hair. Their style is retro 90s bright colors and patterns. They have a YouTube channel where they do avant garde makeup styles tailored to the club culture. The channel's been losing subscribers recently, and their delicate income is at risk. Zee keeps trying to create the right content, but can't seem to connect with their audience anymore. Despite the constant stream of interaction with followers, they've been feeling alone, old, and uncool in their communities. Their biggest fear is dying alone.

The location

The club is in a historical church - stone walls, stained glass windows, and all. The main stage is outfitted with a DJ stand. The pews were removed to create a dance floor. There are multiple, interconnecting rooms

that branch out from the main area. These side rooms are lined with velvet couches, tables interspersed, some outfitted to be VIP areas. There's an old crypt that functions mostly as a storage area for various speakers, electronic equipment, furniture, and decor. The balconies circling the dance floor are roped off for entry. Every room in the club is darkly lit, with the occasional old religious statue along a wall or in a corner. Despite being surrounded by people, the loud music, darkness, and crowds make it easy to feel isolated.

The horror

At first they both thought it was a trick of the light in their selfies. Somewhere in the background of their photos, standing at the edge of the dance floor, peeking around the corner of a doorway, or sitting on the couch next to that couple making out, was their reflection. But it couldn't be their reflection, because there was no mirror there. It couldn't have been a lookalike, because they were wearing the same clothes. No, it was them. Another them in the photo.

The doppleganers stare at Jen and Zee menacingly. They dance sensually with people on the dance floor. When they know Jen or Zee are watching, they lure someone off into a bathroom, an empty side room, an alley... and murder them. The victims are people in their social circles, people who've done something that upset them. They can only be seen in the selfies but the doppelgangers have real effects in the physical world. Their doppelgangers begin to do a number of monstrous things, and nobody seems to notice except for Jen and Zee.

The doppelgangers manifested in the selfies Jen and Zee took before they came out that night. They are opposite reflections of them, their worst thoughts, insecurities, and fears come to life. With each horrible act Jen or Zee can't stop, the doppelgangers get one step closer to taking over their physical bodies. The doppelgangers threaten Jen and Zee if they try to stop them. Yet, the people in danger are all the other club goers, as the doppelgangers need Jen and Zee's bodies alive. Destroying the phones won't work, the doppelgangers will just jump into mirrors. The two friends need to confront and overcome their worst selves.

Example scar scenes

Zee is used to scrutinizing their face in mirrors, picking out every flaw and obsessing over how to hide it. This makes it easier to confront the evil doppelganger version of them that appears in their phone screen. Increase anxiety, but get an extra die when attempting to confront Zee's creepy reflection.

Zee knows this club inside and out, every dark corner and room hidden behind a door that blends seamlessly with the walls. They've spent many an evening in need of a quiet place when feeling insecure about their social interactions at the club. If Zee needs a place to hide themselves or someone else, they can find it.

Jen once got dangerously sick from drinking too much too fast in an attempt to cope with work anxiety. One of the DJs, Erin, helped her get through the disaster. Erin can help out with rolls when identity comes into question.

PRIMUM NON NOCERE

by Becky Annison

Content warnings: hospitals, cancer, child death, medical malpractice

Nina Walton has been in this hospital on this isolation ward for 6 weeks, and she is fucking sick of it. The nurses and doctors spend as little time with her as possible, and she sees the fear in their eyes through the hazmat suits. Whatever really happened in the industrial accident that she, alone, survived, it has everyone worried. Everyone except Asa. Asa comes in to her room dressed the same as the others, but he is so lonely and full of his own cares that chatting with Nina and looking after her seems to be the highlight of his day. An unlikely but surprisingly strong bond of friendship has developed between them. For 6 long weeks that friendship was the only thing that got Nina through her enforced separation and Asa through his crippling self-doubt.

Hospital life moves and flows around them. There is a constant stream of new patients, new visitors and a rotation of orderlies, nurses, and doctors. Asa knows most of them by name but struggles to get close to anyone. Nina was different, she really needed someone to look after her, and Asa suddenly felt that he could help someone after all.

But today is results day! Dr. Finneon is coming to Nina's ward at the end of her rounds to let Nina know if her tests are clear. It won't get her out of the hospital – she is still too weak for that. But it might get her

up on a normal ward with other people and proper visiting hours. Nina and Asa are anxiously hoping for good news.

The main characters

Nina Walton, 40. She is married to the love of her life (Willa), and they have two adorable boys 3 and 5 years old. Sadly, Nina is no stranger to hospitals. She hoped never to be spend this much time in one again. She is traumatised by childhood memories where she would spend hours in this hospital as her parents anxiously await test results and trialled treatment options for the her kid brother Byron's cancer. He eventually died, despite the attempted intervensions. Her greatest fear is that she will never see her family again, just like Byron.

Asa Driver, 27. Asa is one of the most junior nurses at the hospital. He fought hard to get through nursing school. Both of his parents died whilst he was studying, and a problem with his inheritance meant relying on loans and exhausted credit cards to get through his exams. He isn't sure he wants to be a nurse any more, but he feels he owes one last chance to his parents and their desperate wishes to see him succeed. His greatest fear is that he will mess up and harm a patient.

The location

St James's Hospital is an old Victorian teaching hospital and is also the nearest emergency care unit to the Highfield Factory disaster that injured Nina.

It is a listed building that should have been retired years ago, but sentiment and tradition have propped up its decaying carcass. St James' is riddled with odd passages, abandoned wards, and a warren-like underground level that is practically a cave system. The hospital is busy, but despite the hundreds of daily workers and visitors, there are many areas that feel strangely remote and secluded. Places you wouldn't want to get lost in.

The horror

It started as an innocent discussion. Three senior doctors - Finneon, Shipley, and Bennett - complaining about the lack of resources; how the patients weren't getting the care they needed because there wasn't enough to go around. They were worried, tired, and open to anything. Then the Hospital started whispering to them. The whispers pointed out the old and frail who were going to die anyway, showed them who needed to be helped and who was a burden. A few decisions here, a slightly different drug dose there. When the first patients died, it was easy to explain it away; there were so many elderly people at St James', it was practically God's waiting room. Besides, a few virtually miraculous recoveries every year looked good in the patient statistics. Young lives, people with a lot to give back.

But the Hospital grows greedy. The Hospital demands more blood, more victims - a handful of eighty-year olds is no longer enough. The doctors can't block out the Hospital's screaming in their ears and by now they don't even want to. They will make their sacrifices, or the Hospital itself will take everyone.

Example scar scenes

This hospital is a maze. But Nina roamed these corridors as a child, spending hours alone waiting for her parents and brother. If Nina runs off deep into the hospital or the cave-like underground system, she can raise her anxiety score and for an extra die when navigating its corridors.

There is one person in this hospital that remembers Nina as a child. John Painter, the caretaker, is in his early 70s now. However, he remembers that scared little girl with parents too heartbroken to notice her. He was kind to her then, and he will be kind to her again if he can help her on a die roll.

A couple of weeks ago, Asa stopped an exhausted junior doctor from making a near fatal mistake - one Asa himself nearly made last year. Asa never reported the near miss because everyone round here is tired, strung out, and doing their best. Dr. Geraldine Forrester owes Asa big time, and she knows it. She can be brought into scenes if Asa needs a helping hand.

Asa had to fill in for the surgical nurses once. He hated it. The pressure of the operating theatre was terrifying; the patients are so much more vulnerable and exposed. But if he can push through the fear and remember where the surgical tools are kept, then he will get a weapon.

THE PUTNAM

by Jason Morningstar

Content warnings: pregnancy, labour, racism, drugs, drugging, gaslighting

Zia and Nasim met in college, in America, fell in love, and were married. In their final semester, Zia became pregnant and they were overjoyed. Graduate study beckoned, and both were accepted into competitive programs across the country.

The new city isn't great - it's huge and noisy, and full of busy, rude people. And it is astonishingly expensive. After a week of apartment hunting in the summer, the first twinge of apprehension crept into both Nasim and Zia's thoughts. Perhaps they had made a mistake. Perhaps they should go home, get organized, and return when the baby was a little older. Nasim talked them out of it, but promised that if things got worse, they'd revisit the decision. Things didn't get worse. Zia stumbled upon the Putnam instead.

The Putnam is an elegant former hotel in a peaceful corner of the city. It faces a park and a busy street. Zia figured the Putnam would be out of their reach, but the superintendent took one look at that pregnant belly and assured Zia they had an apartment they could afford up on the sixth floor. Zia and Nasim moved in the next day, a little dazed at how easy it was.

The main characters

Zia Al-Rashid is seven months pregnant and feels every minute of it. They are excited to be having a

baby, but are ready for the pregnancy to be over. Still, Zia's 22, about to enter the graduate program of their dreams, madly in love, and perfectly happy despite it all. That's the story they tell, but deep down Zia is anxious and sad. There's homesickness - all this would be so much easier surrounded by overbearing aunties - and the powerful feeling that they just don't belong. Zia sees the looks and reads the paper. America is a dark place and they feel it every day.

Nasim Al-Rashid is Zia's ambitious and good-hearted spouse. They are well aware of the physical toll Zia's pregnancy is taking, and try to make things easier for their partner. Also 22, Nasim is obsessed with a bright future just out of reach - they will both earn prestigious degrees and return to their families with honor and respect. All that is just a few years away, but the truth is that Nasim is a little naive and optimistic. They fancy themselves more American than Americans, and are blind to the casual racism. They don't really want that bright future at all, if it means going home.

Zia and Nasim are both gender neutral names and Al-Rashid means 'the rightly guided'.

The location

The Putnam is a six story apartment building built in the 1890s. Once a hotel, it boasts magnificent views and elegant fin de siècle architectural details. The building's original purpose is obvious on the top floor, where a pair of deluxe suits were converted into a

number of small apartments, leaving an irregular maze of winding corridors. The Putnam is served by a single old elevator, which Zia relies on, and a grand staircase that tops out on the fifth floor. Only the elevator and some former servants' stairs lead to the sixth. A rooftop garden rounds out the charming residence.

The horror

The Putnam residents want Zia's baby. They want it out of her, and they want it dead. No explanation is forthcoming, it is just an immutable fact.

But before that becomes obvious, the neighbors are delightful. The Boyds, who could be grandparents, bring a fresh-baked pie to welcome the young couple. The Greens, an attractive gay couple in their late thirties, all smiles and invitations to tour the neighborhood and have brunch. The Littles, friendly programmers who dropped everything to help the Al-Rashids haul their few belongings up to their new sixth-floor home. Eka, another student who lives alone. Mr. Mendoza, the superintendent. Everyone is just lovely.

There can be a party, or Mr. Mendoza can key into their apartment, but either way both Zia and Nasim's drinks will be spiked with oxytocin. The hormone kickstarts labor in Zia and causes both the Al-Rashids to feel an overall sense of trust and calm. These feelings are just the oxytocin talking, because their neighbors are coming to kill them.

Zia will soon be doubled over by contractions that are way, way too early. Zia and Nasim need to get to a hospital, but first they need to get out of the Putnam.

Phones won't work - the Littles have installed a jammer on the roof. The elevator is blocked. The windows are locked, and the fire escape is missing. The neighbors will block their escape in any way they can.

Scars

Alone and hunted, Zia needs to hide. Zia's player narrates a flashback to their childhood - a stay in an elegant hotel in Paris with their father. The hotel had a dumbwaiter large enough for Zia. In a flash, Zia remembers the garbage chute, and realizes they have the key. Crawling into the filthy chute, the GM tells Zia's player to raise her anxiety score and add an extra die any time she uses the chute.

Zia's player narrates meeting Eka Darmawan, another student who lives alone in the Putnam on the sixth floor. Eka moved in pregnant, and the Putnam cult took her baby. Eka barely remembers it and grieves in quiet terror for their loss, isolated and far from home. Everyone has been so kind. But now Zia sees an ally in Eka. Zia's player can now bring Eka Darmawan into the story to provide help on action rolls.

Nasim's player narrates them carefully setting up their tiny kitchen. The two of them only own a single kitchen knife, a heavy santoku Zia bought from a street vendor. Nasim cut themselves the first time they used it, and the memory of blood spiraling into the sink is a powerful one. Nasim raises their anxiety score by 2 and has access to the knife, which can be used to gain an extra die in any scene in which they use it.

TESTAMENT

by Oli Jeffery

Content warnings: alcohol, substance abuse, mental health, domestic abuse

Caitlin and Ellie were nine and seven when their mother Helena wandered off into the forest surrounding their childhood home and didn't come back. Their father, Nick, had stormed out three days previous, as he did every few months after a row, or another affair, or just because he wanted to drink for several straight days and not look up. By the time he returned home, ready to play happy families again, the kids had been taken into the care system. They haven't spoken to their father since; as far as they knew, he's been living in that big old house by himself - no need to storm out when you're all alone. Two weeks ago, Nick finally managed to fulfil the destiny everyone else could see coming for him, and drank himself to death.

Cait and Ellie haven't spent much time together since leaving their foster home. Caitlin went off to college, and her letters back to Ellie got fewer and fewer and eventually stopped altogether. Ellie was resentful, but ultimately almost grateful - Caitlin looked too much like their mother, and that brought nothing but bad memories. Her own reflection wasn't much better, the spit of her dad. So Ellie avoids mirrors, buzzes her hair, and hides the resemblance under layers of fuck-you makeup. Now, Caitlin and Ellie have to spend the weekend together, returning to their childhood home to sort through the remnants of their father's life and recover what they can of their childhood.

The main characters

Ellie Aaronson, 22. Ellie still lives in the same town they were moved to after their mother's disappearance, only a couple of miles from their foster family's home. She moves from one low-investment, low-pay job to another, until she tells either a customer or the boss to fuck off before passing out in a bar she once got fired from. Her greatest fear is that she'll turn out like her dad.

Caitlin Aaronson, 24. Caitlin is ambitious and determined to break free of past tragedies and her own chronic anxiety and depression, though the amount of pressure she puts on herself is helping neither. She's currently interning at Google and is constantly checking back in with work, treating the whole weekend as an inconvenience whilst repressing anything that might lead her to the same breakdown her mother suffered. Her greatest fear is that she won't be able to outrun herself, and she'll too one day just wander off into the woods, metaphorically or literally.

The location

The Aaronson House was once beautiful, but it's gone to seed in the years that Nick's been living there alone. Outside, its faded grandeur is clear, but the inside stinks of stale alcohol and abandoned takeout. The smell gets worse as you move from the entrance toward the room where the local Sheriff found Nick.

The house is surrounded by thick woods. When his writing career was successful, they were an inspiration to Nick. As it floundered, sunk by a changing market and his own substance abuse, they became a prison.

The horror

Helena Aaronson has been legally dead for years, Nick declaring her death in absentia once he was sober enough. Unfortunately for everyone involved, that's not the case. Helena always struggled with mental illness, and Nick's abusive behavior broke her utterly. She's been living wild in the vast woods surrounding the house in the 15 years since her disappearance. She recently found her way back to the house and murdered Nick, taking him to be a trespasser in her home. The signs of his liver failure were already so apparent that nobody suspected any foul play. Unrecognizable under a decade and a half of filth and matted hair, Helena now lives in the house's attic, prepared to see off any intruders into her domain, and unable to recognize even her own daughters.

Who's not there

Caitlin and Ellie were meant to meet the lawyer handling their father's will at the house. In fact, he is in the house, but he's fallen prey to Helena and is stuffed under a bed in one of the back rooms. The smell emanating from his body is masked by the general miasma in the Aaronson house.

What went wrong yesterday

Ellie and Cait met at the house yesterday, and the pressure of the situation and the awkwardness of seeing each other for the first time in a couple of years

spiralled almost immediately into old arguments. As the session begins, the sisters are not talking to each other, and are sorting through opposite sides of the house.

Example scar scenes

Caitlin's player narrates how during one of their father's drunken rages, their mother got a gun that the girls didn't even know they owned from a safe behind a family portrait and threatened Nick with it. Nick disarmed and beat Helena. The memory leaves Caitlin nauseous, raising her anxiety score by one. But she can now get the gun from behind the family portrait and use it to gain an extra die on any roll involving the gun.

Caitlin remembers that during one of their parents' most violent arguments, their mother took them to stay with the only neighbour for miles around, Mr Bryson. Her mother left them there overnight while she went back to talk to Nick. When Mr Bryson dropped them back the next day, Nick and Helena acted as if nothing had ever happened. Caitlin's player can now bring Mr Bryson into the story to provide help on rolls.

Ellie's player wants to bring in some police assistance, so she narrates the kindly but out of his depth sheriff who brought her and Cait vending machine hot chocolate when their parents both abandoned them. She can now bring the older Sheriff Vaughn into play to help with die rolls, though being a cop in this sort of story is a highly dangerous role. He'll likely be killed by Helena after helping briefly.

TIES THAT BIND

by Lauren McManamon

Content warnings: gaslighting, gang violence, family trauma, alcohol, bad teenage relationships

Ash and Tania are more or less estranged family living in rural New Zealand. Even though Tania raised Ash as a single parent through to teenagehood, they're chalk and cheese. Ash is a rebellious, angry punk, and Tania is a retiree who believes in the paranormal and enjoys gardening. They've barely spoken in the past four years, as Ash left home to pursue a life with her gang, the Katipos. (Katipo are a native, yet highly venomous, black and red spider.)

However, Ash is now back home on house arrest for three months with an ankle tie after a botched drug deal. The good news? The stash is at least on their mum's property. The bad news? They have to put up with mum's well-meaning crap while they're here.

No mobile service, patchy wi-fi, and only an old Playstation 1 to pass the time. For Tania, perhaps this is a chance to reconnect with her child after decades of miscommunication. For Ash... no, this is kind of their personal hell. Unfortunately for them, they're both right, as unknown forces begin menacing them one fateful evening.

The main characters

Ashley "Ash" Wilson, 22 (any pronouns). Ash is the young punk of their family. They moved away from their rural home when they were young. In their late

teens, their got involved in a local gang. A few weeks ago, they took part in a botched drug-deal. Yet while they took the wrap, they also got away with much of the stash. They managed to hide the stash on or in their mum's property on the night it happened. Once their time is up, they're free to do with her haul as they see fit. But if they fail to comply with the house arrest? It'll be a long time in jail with nothing to show for it. They fear becoming everything their mum said they would.

Tania Wilson, 55 (she/her). Up until Ash's arrest, Tania lived alone on the old family property. Retired for a couple of years now, she spends her time gardening, creating amateur pottery, DIYing the house, and engaging radio talk shows. Her favourite radio show is NZ Paranormal hosted by Claudia Parata; a show that takes calls from people who have experienced supernatural phenomena. She's somewhat of a believer in ghostly entities herself. She's mostly pleased her child is back, even if there are arguments, shouting, and slammed doors. She fears losing her child again.

The location

The Wilson house has been a couple of things in its time—a farmstead, an orphanage, house for deviant youth, and now a family home with a couple of cows and chickens. With its remodelling through each phase of its life, it's a trove of history, crawlspaces, and plastered over secret rooms. The attic and basement contain dusty relics from the present and previous

tenants. It creaks and groans during strong winds, and the electrics are known to flicker. Oh, and it still uses an outhouse a short walk from the house. The place is isolated, wi-fi is patchy, and mobile phone services? Forget it. The faded red cord phone in the kitchen is the only connection to the outside world.

The horror

Ash's gang, the Katipos, have figured out where Ash lives right now, and suspect the Wilson house is the location of their stash. True to their name, they're quiet, have the ability to get into anywhere, and are pretty deadly. The Katipo would prefer to get in, find the stash, get out, and move the stash with Ash stuck on house arrest. This means things like unlocking the basement hatch to root around in the scrap, creeping into crawl spaces and the attic, turning a light on in the outhouse to draw people outside, and cutting the phone line. As they become more desperate to find the stash during their heist, who knows what they'll do.

Example scar scenes

While escaping a gang member, Ash remembers a strange hidden passageway they found as a child the night their other parent left. They clambered down the vent-sized space and peeked through a hole in the wall to witness a teary, ugly argument between their parents. It ended in one picking up a packed bag and leaving for good. Ash can now use that passage on a roll to escape to another part of the house.

Ash recalls hastily burying the stash in the basement just several weeks ago. They realise they dropped a walkie-talkie they used to communicate with the Katipo during the digging. The memory reminds Ash just how terrifying and dangerous things are right now. However, they can get the walkie-talkie and use it on die rolls - such as listening in on the gang's whereabouts.

Tania remembers the night her spouse left very well. She remembers the guilt of leaving her child home alone while she ran to her neighbour's for consolation in a friend and a bottle. Suzy McKay, a no-nonsense, gun-toting farmer, gave her way too much whisky and a promise that if shit ever went down, Tania could count on her. Tania can now bring in Suzy to help with die rolls.

Tania remembers the shock she felt when she caught Ash handling a gun in their room six years ago. Things escalated into a one-sided yelling match on both ends about privacy and safety, ending in the gun accidentally firing into the floorboards. Tania recalls taking the gun from Ash's shaking hands and storing it forgotten in her closet. Tania raises her anxiety score, but can now use the gun to gain an extra die when using it in a roll.



FILMOGRAPHY

Absentia (2011)

Directed by: Mike Flanagan

Flanagan's feature debut immediately marked him as the leading voice of melancholy horror. Two sisters, one heavily pregnant and with a missing partner, the other recovering from heroine addiction, are beset by visions and a deeply disturbing take on a fairytale monster, leading to an absolute gut-punch of a finale.

Candyman (1992)

Directed by: Bernard Rose

Often bracketed with supernatural slashers like *Friday The 13th* and *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, *Candyman* has a completely different vibe – and a lot to say about pain, racism, and the way the stories we tell ourselves about evil shape the world we live in.

Don't Look Now (1973)

Directed by: Nicolas Roeg

A couple head to Venice after the tragic death of their daughter, and things get weird. One of the best regarded films about grief and desperation, it's also got creepy clairvoyants, and an ending that'll burn itself into your brain forever.

Eden Lake (2008)

Directed by: James Watkins

Released right in the middle of the 'Broken Britain' panic, *Eden Lake* paints a particularly brutal picture of contemporary British society. Nonchalance in the face of extreme violence is the name of the game here, with no optimism anywhere to be found.

Funny Games (2007)

Directed by: Michael Haneke

Michael Haneke remade his own 1997 film of the same title, having decided the original German version didn't disturb enough English-speakers. Expect to feel like Haneke just personally popped round to punch you, specifically, in the face, and that he really enjoyed doing it.

Frontier(s) (2007)

Directed by: Xavier Gens

Somehow, this film about a Muslim gang fleeing riots in Paris and falling into the clutches of neo-Nazis has only become more harrowing since it was released in 2007. This is feel-bad cinema at its most extreme.

The Haunting of Hill House (TV - 2018)

Directed by: Mike Flanagan

This adaptation of Shirley Jackson's novel changes a lot, and has far too many characters to be directly analogous to a game of *Quietus*, but it absolutely defines melancholy horror, and its many flashback scenes are perfect scar material. That, and the bit in the car makes everyone scream out loud the first time they see it, so that's got to be a recommendation, right?

Haute Tension / Switchblade Romance (2003)

Directed by: Alexandre Aja

Besties Marie and Alex head to Alex's parents' house for a study break, but all is not what it seems in this extremely tense, extremely gory French movie. Don't think too hard about the mechanics of the plot – it definitely doesn't stand up to a rewatch – but the atmosphere is suitably downbeat.

Hereditary (2018)

Directed by: Ari Aster

Something happens in *Hereditary* that's so unimaginably awful that, for a moment, both the characters on screen and the audience watching are paralysed.

How do you process something like that? How do you move on when something like that can happen, and there's no way back? Absolutely bone-chilling, absolutely masterful.

Hush (2016)

Directed by: Mike Flanagan

If the idea of dealing with a psychopath who's planning to invade your home and murder you wasn't already terrifying enough, imagine doing it without being able to hear the killer creeping up on you – or to scream for help. Mike Flanagan plays with the conventions of the slasher genre by making his final girl deaf-mute, and ramps up the desperation of her plight at the same time.

It's / Them (2006)

Directed by: David Moreau and Xavier Palud

Heavy on the suspense and determined to make you feel unsafe in your own home – or anywhere else you happen to be – *It's* is another product of the mid-2000s terror where just existing might be enough to attract the attention of bloodthirsty, nihilistic killers. Maybe it is.

In Fear (2013)

Directed by: Jeremy Lovering

Still in the honeymoon phase of their relationship, Tom and Lucy are driving through the Irish countryside in search of the luxury hotel they're staying at that night. Except the roads all seem to lead in circles, the hotel may not exist, and someone is stalking them in the shadows. A great example of just how terrifying a motiveless killer can be and (spoiler alert) how to handle one character dying a while before the end.

The Invitation (2015)

Directed by: Karyn Kusama

Social anxiety is the main villain here. A man takes his new girlfriend to a party at his former partner's house, and finds that she's joined some kind of cult. Are they as sinister as they seem, or is his barely suppressed grief and guilt just making it seem that way? Pure nightmare fuel for anyone who's ever agonised over trying to leave a social event early.

It Follows (2014)

Directed by: David Robert Mitchell

Maybe sex has always spelled death for teenagers in horror films, but never quite so explicitly as it does in *It Follows*, where a sexually transmitted ghoul slowly but surely stalks its victims. Eros and Thanatos, indeed.

Kill List (2011)

Directed by: Ben Wheatley

It's the sound design that'll get you. Shouting and screaming bleed from one scene to another, leading a sinister edge to otherwise innocuous scenes of domesticity. Nothing's safe here, even when it looks it – whatever disastrous thing happened to hitmen Jay and Gal in Kyiv, they won't get much of a chance to deal with it before fate comes knocking.

L'Interieur / Inside (2007)

Directed by: Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo

Trauma piles on top of trauma here, as poor pregnant widowed Sarah finds herself at the mercy of a stalker hellbent on stealing her unborn child. Think of a traumatic event and it's virtually guaranteed to happen to her in this movie. If this script were a game, well, let's just say her player definitely didn't win.

The Loved Ones (2012)

Directed by: Sean Byrne

If movies have taught us anything, it's that anyone who doesn't get to have the perfect prom will become a homicidal maniac. If you're squeamish, skip this one – it's got some of the most painful-looking (and painful-sounding) torture around.

Martyrs (2008)

Directed by: Pascal Laugier

Some abuses can't be forgiven – or forgotten. Is there a point to suffering? The demented philosophers in this movie might say so, but the events of the film suggest otherwise. Bleak, bleak, so unendingly bleak.

May (2002)

Directed by: Lucky McKee

Bullied throughout her life, unable to relate to her colleagues, and rejected romantically for being too weird, lonely May decides the only way to make friends is to, well, make herself a friend in this deeply upsetting, deliriously gory nightmare of a film.

Midsommar (2019)

Directed by: Ari Aster

Aster's follow-up to the wrenching *Hereditary* is mostly set in a bright, sunshiney Swedish commune where everyone's happy... until they're not. But though the scenery is different, there's a similar vein of dark despair running through *Midsommar*, as yet another unimaginably awful tragedy strikes.

Musaranas / Shrew's Nest (2014)

Directed by: Juanfer Andrés, Esteban Roel

A Spanish melodrama that's almost in the Douglass Sirk vein initially, as older sister Montse pines for her lost youth when she's left caring for her younger sister Nia after their mother dies and their father abandons them. Things take a turn from miserable to Misery when their handsome upstairs neighbour injures himself while drunk and Monste takes it on herself to nurse him back to health. Then, tragic backstory unfolds and it descends into a hideously gory, but no less melodramatic finale.

The Neon Demon (2016)

Directed by: Nicholas Winding Refn

If you're in a particularly abstract mood, you could run a game of *Quietus* where the horror is an entire city or industry, as we have in *The Neon Demon*. Here, the LA fashion industry eats young aspiring model Jesse alive, literally and figuratively.

Nina Forever (2015)

Directed by: Ben and Chris Blaine

Getting over the loss of a loved one is hard enough even without their broken and bloodied ghost showing up every time you get sexy with a new partner. The desperation is palpable in this one. It's brilliant

Oculus (2013)

Directed by: Mike Flanagan

Along with *The Strangers*, *Oculus* is one of the key touchpoints for the game, and a serious gut-punch of a film. Think cycles of abuse, think generational scars, think spectres lurking in dark corners.

Hope can't survive for more than a few moments in this film without being shattered. Probably Mike Flanagan's finest work. Not to be watched alone.

Resolution (2012)

Directed by: Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead

Two former friends reunite at a remote cabin in the woods. One of them is a paranoid drug addict, the other is an outwardly successful, happily married graphic designer. But there's something in the woods that might unravel them both – and you, the hapless viewer, are far from innocent.

Spoorloos / The Vanishing (1988)

Directed by: George Sluizer

A man searches obsessively for his girlfriend, who disappeared mysteriously one day after having recurring nightmares about being inside a golden egg. What happened to her? The answer is simple, but unrelentingly horrible. You could definitely play this scenario as a game of *Quietus*.

The Strangers (2008)

Directed by: Bryan Bertino

While not the best film on this list (and probably not even the best film in *The Strangers* series), *The Strangers* is the most direct inspiration for this game, and features motiveless killers, two main characters, tragic flashbacks, a side character who shows up to help and immediately dies, and an epilogue showing the results of the trauma. If you only watch one film on this list before running *Quietus*, make it this one.

The Strangers: Prey At Night (2018)

Directed by: Johannes Roberts

Scariest and more fun than the original, with the addition of a largely unexplained 80s pop soundtrack. The scene around the swimming pool - soundtracked by Total Eclipse of the Heart - is a perfect example of several desperate rolls at once, one which raises hope, one which raises despair, without either fully defeating the horror or killing the main character. The titular strangers remain an archetypal *Quietus* horror.

Suzzanna: Buried Alive (2018)

Directed by: Rocky Soraya

Part love letter to Indonesian horror queen Suzzanna, part revenge movie, *Suzzanna: Buried Alive* is a heartbreaker about what happens when a pregnant woman is thoughtlessly murdered by her husband's employees. It's funny and creepy, too, but oh, so sweetly sad.

Suspiria (2018)

Directed by: Luca Guadagnino

The remake of Dario Argento's 1977 witchy masterpiece ramps up the psychological horror, and makes the story's Berlin setting much more relevant. Evil matriarchs abound, with layer upon layer of guilt piled on.

Under the Shadow (2016)

Directed by: Babak Anvari

Hard to know what the scariest part of this film is: the evil djinn, the encroaching Iran/Iraq war, or the demonstration of how an entire society's values can change – almost overnight. Actually, it's definitely the last one, as our heroine Shideh is brave and smart enough to fight the supernatural, but can't be expected to bring down the whole political system that seeks to oppress her because of her gender.

The Woman in Black (2012)

Directed by: James Watkins

Technically a supernatural horror movie, but plays very much like a flesh-and-blood home invasion movie. It's also a good example of how a main character's scars can keep them in a location when they really ought to leave.



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Q U I E T U S

IT'S 3 AM. THERE'S SOMEONE IN YOUR HOUSE. THEY'RE GOING TO KILL YOU.

QUIETUS is a one shot, prepless RPG of melancholy horror. It's a game for a GM and one or two players, and emulates tragic horror movies like *Oculus*, *The Strangers*, *The Babadook*, *Inside* and the Netflix version of *The Haunting of Hill House*. If a piece of fiction can make you cry and scream, then it's a great model for the sort of stories that you can tell with QUIETUS.

Powered by a stripped down version of the award-winning *Blades in the Dark* engine, you'll create characters with tragic backstories, and send them hurtling headlong into a nightmare where their past trauma might be the only thing that saves them.



PLAYERS

2 - 3

TIME

1 - 2 HOURS

AGES

15+

