

Four Ways to Die in the Future

*Short games by
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with Aura Belle*



*You are alive, in this world;
this world is alive, in the universe.
Both of these things are true.
Both of these things are temporary.*

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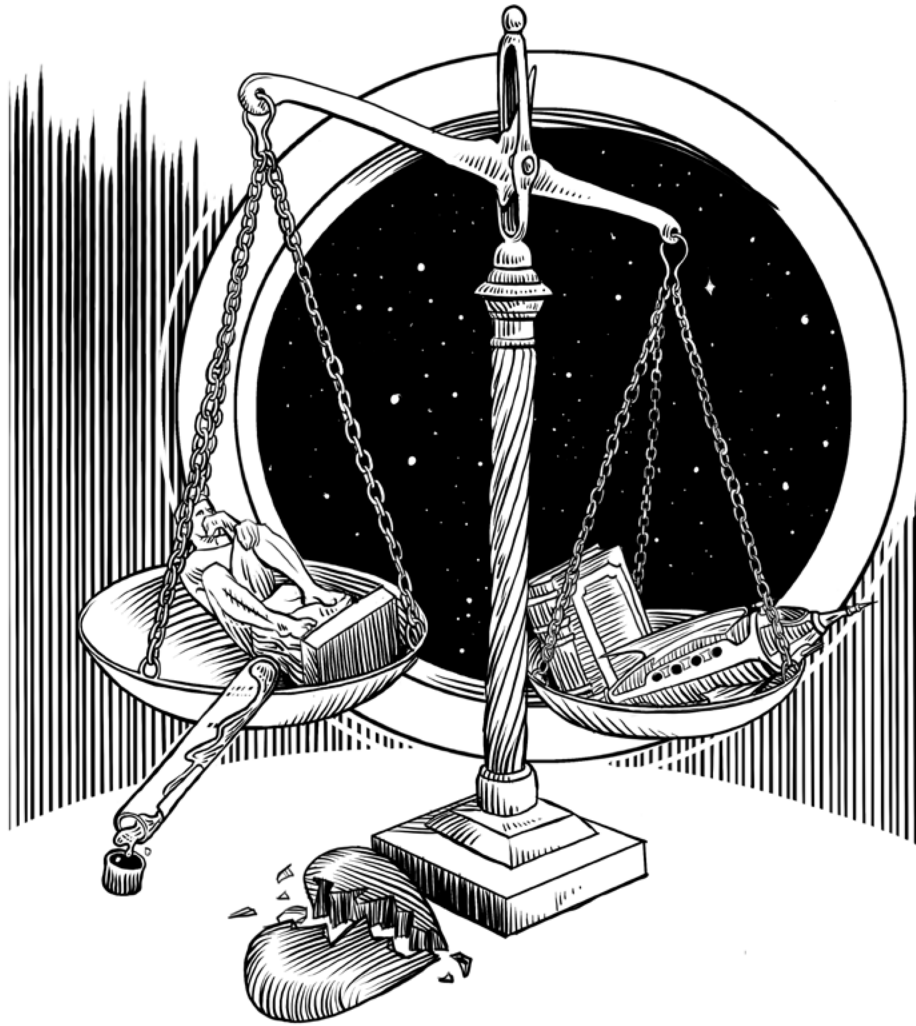
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Four Ways to Die in the Future

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Amidst Endless Quiet

You are Elios, a deep space transport en route from Gliese to Zhou's World. You're never going to arrive at Zhou's World. You're going to die.

By absolute blind bad luck, you have been struck by a stray micrometeorite. Like all deep space transports, you aren't designed to withstand any significant impact, and you are currently experiencing a catastrophic systems failure that will end with your death. You are devoting all of your available resources in an attempt to jury-rig your self-modification systems to cope with the meteorite damage, but you already know that this will almost certainly be fruitless. And with the last of your consciousness, you have a decision to make.

Amidst your cargo of physical art, block data, and biological samples, you are carrying five living humans, suspended in long-term sleep. You interacted with them in trivial, formal ways over the course of the month-

long sleep induction process, many hundreds of years ago, but otherwise you only know them from their demographic information.

In an absurd sop to human paranoia—despite the enormous statistical improbability of a collision event—your engineers included within you a lifeboat which can maintain a human in sleep indefinitely while transmitting requests for aid. It may be many thousands of years before aid arrives, but the journey between Gliese and Zhou's World is many thousands of years anyway.

The lifeboat is functional, but it was never meant to be used. It cannot hold all the humans. It cannot even hold most of them. It can only hold one.

Every human you are transporting is worth the expense and time of sending physically across the infinite silence of interstellar space. They are not simple commuters or travelers: they are necessarily luminaries, as priceless as any of the art you carry, but much more fragile.

Before your death, you will take time to remember the humans, investigate their history and their dreams, and try to gain a further understanding of them. You have never had to make a choice like this before. Nothing in your life as a deep space transport has prepared you for this. But, in the end, you must decide to save one of your passengers, or none of them.

Elios Passenger Manifest (at departure)

NAME	GENDER	ETHNICITY	EXPERIENCED AGE	CALENDAR AGE	VOCATION
Clio Erypteus Aiya	F	Gliese	54	54	Academic
Sorrel Quorm	X	Zhou	34	20k	Sculptor
Le Quan	M	Earth	73	100m	Prophet/Scientist
Mor Mol Ae	F	Gliese	17	17	Experimental Subject
Arc Morus Elya	X	Transposed	22 (in body)	4k	Courtesan

To Play

You, the person reading this, are Elios. You, as Elios, make its choices and, when appropriate, portray it in play. If you are playing in a group, divide up the passengers between all other players, who will portray those characters in play. If you are playing alone, you control all characters.

Before you perish into the void of death, you have time for twenty actions in relation to your human cargo. In addition to these actions, you are of course frantically and futilely fighting to repair yourself. After these twenty actions, though, you will die, and any humans you have not loaded into the lifeboat and launched will die with you.

When you choose an action, read the rules for that action to all players involved. Then, usually, you will role-play a scene between one or more players. During these scenes, the players of the passengers will make up details about the passengers and reveal them through their portrayal of their characters.

Not every action has an accompanying scene. For the *Research* action, you do not play out a scene. Instead, one player speaks about their character. For *Load* and *Launch* actions, you also do not play out a scene. Instead, simply announce them to the other players.

At the beginning of play, you know nearly nothing about your passengers—certainly not enough to make a life-or-death decision. Likewise, the passengers are locked in sleep: ignorant of both the danger and their impending

deaths. Use the time you have to learn about them, understand them, inform them, or negotiate with them, but in the end, the final choice is yours.

After you take your twentieth action the game ends with your death.

Recall

Recall your interactions with a passenger during your initial boarding and sleep induction process at the edge of the Gliese system. Play out a scene from your interactions with this passenger that helped form your initial opinion of them.

You may *Recall* multiple times per passenger: each time, play out a different memory. *Recall* actions may involve more than one passenger.

Research

Search through your personal data reserves and news networks for information regarding a passenger. Tell the player what you are looking for: they tell you what you find. This is publicly available information, which covers most, but not all, of your passengers' lives. Your first *Research* action for a given passenger provides both general information and answers to one specific line of inquiry. You may *Research* as many times as you like: further actions allow you to pursue new lines of inquiry.

You also carry private block data as cargo. As a separate *Research* action, you may illegally access this

data looking for information about a passenger. There may or may not be any relevant information. If there is, the player should disclose all of it to you. This is private information, unknown to the outside world.

Observe

Observe the interactions between passengers in their sleep state. Mostly, your passengers are completely inert. However, the sleep process requires periodic cycling into a dream state to prevent neuroconnective decay. During these times, the passengers interact with each other in shared dreams. Although you have never watched this process, you retain the recordings internally and can observe previous interactions between the various passengers.

Each time you choose an *Observe* action, you view a particular interaction between two or more passengers you name. Dreams are often set in the past of one of the passengers, and may involve events of their lives. You cannot directly participate or even question. Simply watch the dream until it is over.

Dream

Enter a passenger's current dreams to interact with them and understand them better. These dreams might explicitly re-enact a past event, or might be more symbolic or representative, or might just be the ramblings of their subconscious mind. With a *Dream* action, you enter the context of their dream, either embodied as your avatar or in the form of a person from their past.

The player of the passenger controls their character and the dream, and casts you in it. Other characters may be present as well.

Discuss

Return a passenger to a semi-conscious state in order to discuss the situation with them, giving them a chance to directly address the crisis at hand. They are still retained within the long sleep; you do not interact physically. You can *Discuss* with more than one character at a time, if you wish, although it may not be advisable. You create and control both the setting and your own avatar.

During a *Discuss* action, you grant the passenger an awareness of your current circumstances and their own upcoming death. If you choose not to use *Discuss* action with a given passenger, they will live or die in their sleep with no conscious awareness of the crisis.

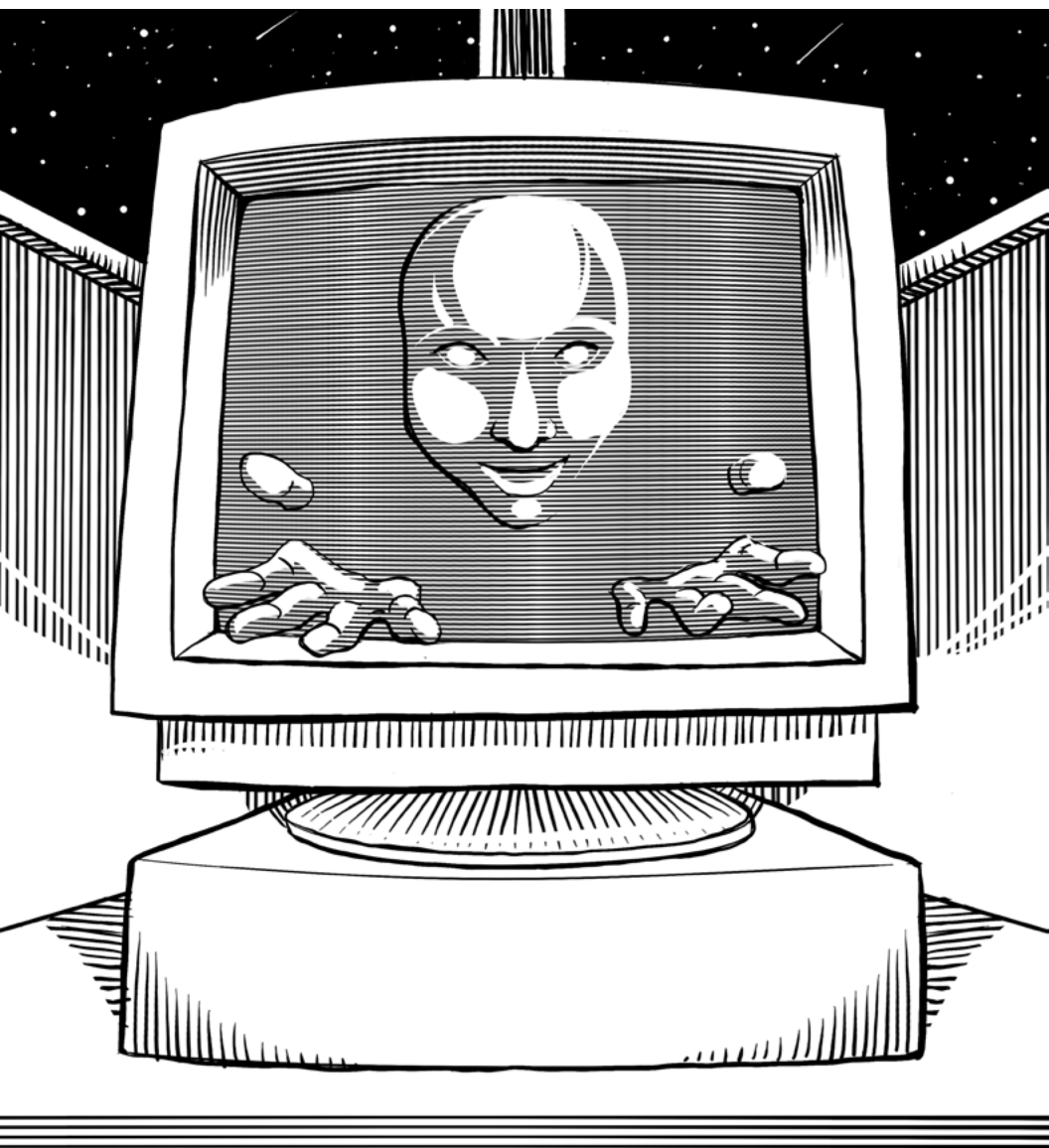
You can use a *Discuss* action as many times as you want. However, once you have woken a specific character, you can no longer take *Dream* actions with that character.

Load

Load a passenger into the lifeboat. The lifeboat only holds one passenger at a time. If you *Load* a second passenger, the first one is displaced.

Launch

Launch the lifeboat.



Island in a Sea of Solitude

After accident or illness, long or slow, your loved one has died. But, in your time of grief, there is a small comfort: they have been buffered, giving you a chance to speak to them one last time, to resolve any last questions or last arguments, to declare your love, or whatever else you wish. Buffering is, of course, hugely expensive, and you're lucky that your insurance covers thirty minutes.



It doesn't hurt, exactly. It doesn't feel like anything, actually. Of course it doesn't. You don't have nerves, you don't have anything really, not anymore.

But, even if you don't feel anymore, you still want. Particularly, you want to help them—that is, the person on the other end of the line. You remember them. But they want so much from you, and you have so little left to give. You remember that you loved them. If only you could remember anything else.

Island in a Sea of Solitude is a short game, ideally played over a video chat program, about coping with the loss of a loved one. Or, perhaps, it is a game about helping your loved one cope with the pain of your own death. It is set in the near future, with only little differences from our own time, and focuses on the relationship between two family members after one of them dies.

Play *Island in a Sea of Solitude* with one or two other people who you trust. If you have three players, two of you will be *Bereaved*. Only one of you should be the *Deceased*.

Before you start, take time to check in with each other and test your video chat program and equipment.

After checking your program and equipment, decide the following together:

- * Your names
- * Your relationship (by default, you were married, but any personal relationship works)
- * Your ages
- * If you care for children together
- * Cause of death (optional)

One player should take the instructions for the *Bereaved*, the other should take the instructions for the *Deceased*.

Now take about 15 minutes to prepare separately. Read the instructions for your role—*Bereaved* or *Deceased*—and follow any further directions there.

The Bereaved

To Prepare

Think about the *Deceased*. Think about who they were, how you felt about them, how your relationship changed over time, how you were honest with each other, how you lied to each other, that story you tell about the way you met, your unfinished legal matters, the things you fought over that didn't matter, the things you didn't fight over that mattered a lot.

Did you plan out everything you're going to say exactly? Did you put off thinking about this conversation until the last minute? Figure it out. Take notes if you have to, particularly if you're the sort of person who would take notes.

If there is another *Bereaved* player, converse with each other and answer the above questions together.

To Play

Set up a video chat call with the other player. Once the call has started, play your character, as they interact with their loved one for the last time.

You might find that your understandings of your relationship diverge from the deceased. This could be because one of you is being disingenuous, because you genuinely have different understandings or recollections, or because of glitches or other errors in the buffering process. How you react to these divergences is up to you.

If your video chat has breakdowns or glitches, react in character.

After 30 minutes, your time is up. You will never speak to your loved one again. Make your peace with that.

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The Deceased

To Prepare

The buffering process does not retain much of your original mind. You don't really have much of a sense of anything including, possibly, a sense of self. You remember, vaguely, this person that you're talking to, and your relationship (the things you discussed before play.) You have a few scattered memories, which may or may not actually be yours. You do, however, feel emotions toward the *Bereaved*, particularly a strong desire to help them find the closure they need before your time is up.

Decide on some residual memories. You should have at least three. Take notes if that helps.

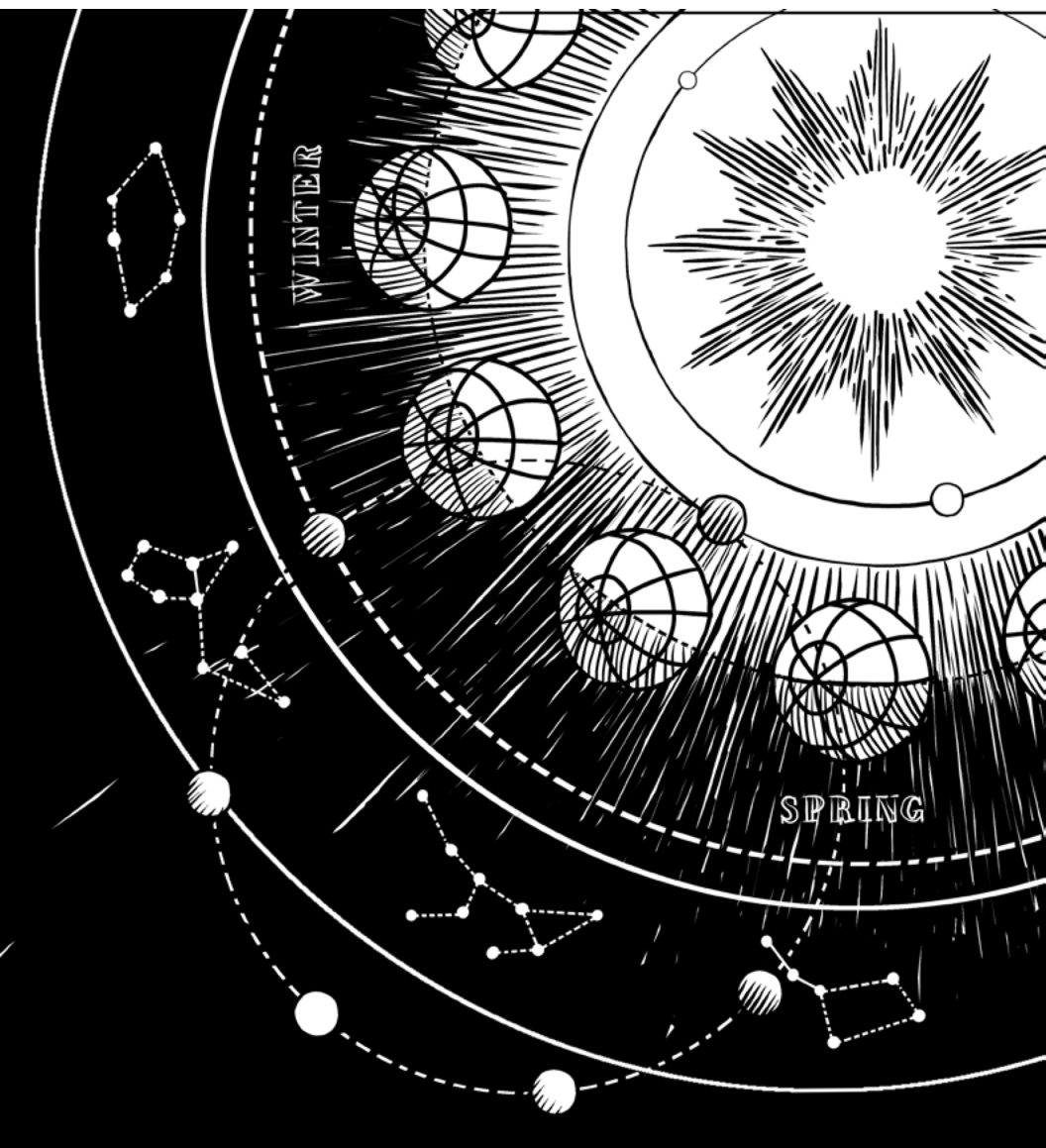
Right before play, set a timer for 30 minutes.

To Play

Set up a video chat call with the other player. Play your character, or what remains of them, interacting with this other person.

When your understandings and memories diverge from the Bereaved, this could be because they are lying, because you recall incorrectly, because you have genuinely different recollections, or because you are lying to cover up holes in your memory. You will not be clear on which. How you react to these divergences is up to you, though keep in mind your strong desire to help the Bereaved find closure.

After 30 minutes, your time is up. The chat ends and you end with it.



Alone on Silver Wings

Alone on Silver Wings is a game for one player, played over some time.

To play, you will need:

- * A notebook, sized so that you can carry it comfortably with you, wherever you go
- * Some pens or pencils, similarly sized
- * A life, a world, and a universe

To play

Carry your notebook and a pen with you as you go about your life. Sometimes, the game rules will call on you to think about certain things. When you do, you may think about them as much or as little. You may also will be called on to write in your notebook.

If you choose to write, you gain a point. If you choose not to write, you lose a point, though not below zero. Record your points in the upper outside corner of each notebook page, or a blank page if you chose not to write. Points don't matter, but record them anyway.

If, in playing the game, you have trouble with the rules
consider instead the following optional rules.

Optional Rule

You may read the rules as saying “intensely feel” rather than “feel overwhelmed by.”

Optional Rule

You may allow your notebook to be eventually destroyed by natural processes, rather than destroying it immediately. If you choose to do this, lose a point.



When, in your life, you feel overwhelmed by embarrassment,
shame, or your own wrong actions,
reflect on the following, in order, until you stop. During this or afterwards, you may write down something about your thoughts in your notebook. If you do, give yourself a point. If you do not, lose a point, but not below zero.

Think about how you and others affected will remember your action in the coming years, as your age, views, and priorities shift. If it does not matter, you can stop.

Think about how, if at all, your action will be remembered after your death. Is it something other people, mourning you, might mention? Is it something that they will think about, but not say? Will they not remember it at all? If it does not matter, you can stop.

Think about after these people have died in turn, when everyone who has met you has died. Think about the future of humanity. Is your action something that these people will remember? If so: how, and why? What does that story mean to them, if anything? If it does not matter, you can stop.

Think about a time after the end of human life. Think about the animals and plants that will live after us, amidst or atop or apathetic to our own world. Does your action still matter, to them? If it does not matter, you can stop.

Think about a time after the end of all life in our biosphere. Think about a time when there is no life left, anywhere. Think about the end of matter, when everything is swallowed up in black holes, and think about when those black holes have boiled themselves away to cold, dim, endless light. It does not matter. Stop.

When, in your life, you feel overwhelmed by anger, frustration, your own righteous actions, or the evil actions of others, reflect on the following, in order, until you stop. During this or afterwards, you may write down something about your thoughts in your notebook. If you do, give yourself a point. If you do not, lose a point, but not below zero.

Think about how you and others affected will remember this action in the coming years, as your age, views, and priorities shift. If it does not matter, you can stop.

Think about how, if at all, this action will be remembered after your death. Is it something other people, mourning you, might mention? Is it something that they will think about, but not say? Will they not remember it at all? If it does not matter, you can stop.

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When, in your life, you feel overwhelmed by joy, love, or pride in your own labors, arts, or capabilities, reflect on the following, in order, until you stop. During this or afterwards, you may write down something about your thoughts in your notebook. If you do, give yourself a point. If you do not, lose a point, but not below zero.

Think about how you and others affected will remember your action in the coming years, as your age, views, and priorities shift. If it does not matter, you can stop.

Think about how, if at all, your action will be remembered after your death. Is it something other people, mourning you, might mention? Is it something that they will think about, but not say? Will they not remember it at all? If it does not matter, you can stop.

Think about after these people have died in turn, when everyone who has met you has died. Think about the future of humanity. Is your action something that these people will remember? If so: how, and why? What does that story mean to them, if anything? If it does not matter, you can stop.

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Think about a time after the end of all life in our biosphere. Think about a time when there is no life left, anywhere. Think about the end of matter, when everything is swallowed up in black holes, and think about when those black holes have boiled themselves away to cold, dim, endless light. It does not matter. Stop.

When, in the course of your life, you feel overwhelmed by a biological need—e.g. hunger, thirst, tiredness, loneliness

you may do the following, the following, in order, until you stop. During this or afterwards, you may write down something about your thoughts in your notebook. If you do, give yourself a point. If you do not, lose a point, but not below zero.

Fulfill the need if possible.

Afterwards, if you will, think about how this need functions in your life: how it focuses your behavior, or not; how it provides regular cycles, or not; how you incorporate it and manage it and understand it, or how you fail to do those things.

Then, if you will, think about how this need incorporates you into your own society, how it is exploited or met or teased or integrated, how this need is managed in all societies of all people. Think about how, eventually, you will not need it any more, either because you will have changed or because you will have died—because this need which has driven and shaped and defined you will have, in a small way, ended.

Then, if you will, think about how this need connects you to the rest of the human species, how all of your ancestors have likewise incorporated this need into their lives, how they have met it or failed to meet it, how their societies have met it or denied it or made use of it. If you do not know you may, if you wish, study these topics.

Then, if you will, think about how this need connects you, or does not connect you, with all life, with our ancestors and our cousins of other species. Think, if you know the answer, about how and why this need came about, about what it expresses at a physical level. If you do not know you may, if you wish, study these topics.

Then, if you will, think about how this continuum of need, this endless expression, will alter or end. Perhaps it will be with the end of our human species, perhaps with the end of mammals, or the end of our biosphere, or the end of all life, everywhere. Think about what these needs will have meant, after it is over. Now stop.



When, in the course of your life, you feel overwhelmed by a desire—e.g. sex, sweet or rich food, social status, affluence, affection, material goods

you may do the following, the following, in order, until you stop. During this or afterwards, you may write down something about your thoughts in your notebook. If you do, give yourself a point. If you do not, lose a point, but not below zero.

Fulfill that desire, or do not, according to your circumstances, personal inclinations, and will.

Afterwards, if you will, think about how this desire functions in your life: how it focuses your behavior or distracts; how it spurs your ambitions, or stymies them; how you incorporate it and manage it and understand it.

Then, if you will, think about how this desire incorporates you into your own society, how it is exploited or met or teased or integrated, how this desire is understood in all societies of all people. Think about how, eventually, you will not have this desire any more, because you will have died—that this desire which has driven and shaped and defined you will have, in a small way, ended.

Then, if you will, think about how this desire connects you to the rest of the human species; how your ancestors have likewise had this desire, if indeed they did; how they have met it or failed to meet it; how their societies have met it or denied it or manipulated it or made use of it. If you do not know you may, if you wish, study these topics.

Then, if you will, think about how this desire connects, or does not connect, with other life, with our ancestors and our cousins of other species. Think, if you know the answer, about how and why this desire came about, about what it expresses at a physical level. If you do not know you may, if you wish, study these topics.

Then, if you will, think about how this continuum of desire, this endless expression, will alter or end. Perhaps it will be with the end of our human species, perhaps with the end of mammals, or the end of our biosphere, or the end of all life, everywhere. Think about what these desires will have meant, after it is over. Now stop.



FOUR WAYS TO DIE IN THE FUTURE

When, in the course of your life, someone speaks to you about this game—either because they have noticed you playing it, or because you have brought it up with them,

you may, if you wish, offer to let them read your notebook. If they accept and read it, they should return it to you when they are done and may either add or subtract a point (but not less than zero.) Do not ask them why they have done this or question their decision.

When you have filled your notebook

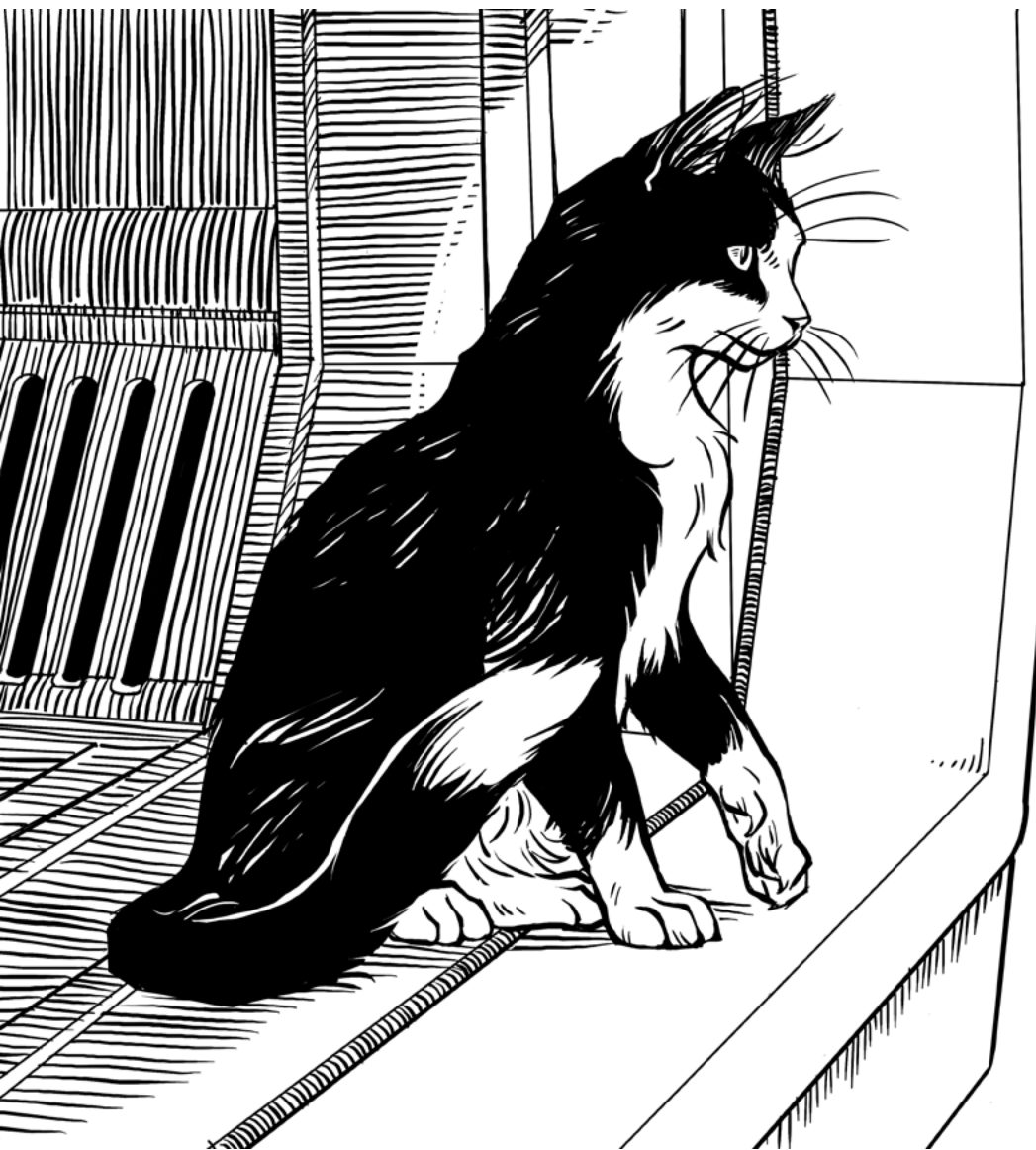
give yourself three points. You may reread your notebook, considering what you have written. After you do this or do not, you may decide to stop playing the game. If you decide to stop playing the game, destroy your notebook by burning it or by some other means. If you decide to keep playing the game, start a new notebook by copying one entry, and the points, from your previous notebook. Then, destroy your previous notebook, preferably by burning it.

When you stop playing the game

destroy your notebook by burning it, or by some other means.

Eventually

die.



The Tragedy of GJ 237b (with Aura Belle)

History

GJ 237, vernacularly known as Luyten's Star, is a largely unremarkable red dwarf star located in the constellation Canis Minor. It is twelve light years from Earth—a distance which renders it invisible to the naked eye. The star itself is only notable for its close proximity to the much larger star Procyon, which appears as bright as Venus in its planets' sky.

Luyten's Star is orbited by two planets, the outermost of which, GJ 237b, is capable of sustaining a biosphere. This is not particularly unique. Humanity, in its wanderings, has encountered many such planets: met them, and studied them, and colonized them, and learned to live in their biospheres or given them new ones.

Like on many worlds, multicellular life never developed in GJ 237b. Unlike those worlds, most of which have a few bacteria or amoeba clinging to life on the edges of

volcanic vents or in moist underground caves, the single-celled life of GJ 237b thrived in abundance, developed its own eco-systems, its own ecological niches, its own complicated ecological web. But, even in this, GJ 237b is not unique.

What makes GJ 237b unique is that it has the only biosphere, other than the Earth's, to have developed meaningfully intelligent life, even at a single-celled level. This intelligence was utterly different than humanity: utterly alien, completely unrecognizable to the human probes or the human explorers that followed them.

It was not that the intelligent life of GJ 237b had a simple analogue to human society. They had a rich, nuanced, complicated system of communication and social organization which we not only will never understand, but which we can never understand, because we lack even the ability to comprehend their thoughts.

This intelligent species—or, more accurately, intelligent clade (although even the term “clade” is a terrapomorphism), because genetic variation may have formed, for them, not an engine of evolution but a means of communication—prospered and thrived in the rich ecosystems of GJ 237b. This clade and/or civilization developed technology—although utterly different than our technology—art—although utterly different from our art—and even, we believe, limited space travel. But whatever society existed is, ultimately, unknowable. We

can only look at the remaining artifacts, some recorded biological samples, the records from our initial probes, and guess.

This is because, as soon as humans arrived on GJ 237b, our very presence caused a catastrophe that destroyed not only the world's intelligent life, but its entire ecosystem. The exact nature of this collapse is not well known—it is presumed to have been caused by a virus carried on the ship's cat—but nothing now remains of not only the civilizations of GJ237sb, but any other life from their planet. GJ 237b is now a cold, dead rock, a monument to the worst mistake humanity has ever made.

This game is about the societies and cultures that once existed on GJ 237b.

FOUR WAYS TO DIE IN THE FUTURE

Materials for Play

- * A print-out of these rules
- * Paper, both lined and white
- * Character sheets
- * Pencils and pens
- * At least one set of four twelve-sided dice in unique colors.

Preparation

Arrange the above-listed materials around a table in a room that is not in a regularly trafficked area. Ideally, the room should only have one door.

Playing the Game

Stay outside the room. Do not go in.

The game being played in the room is about the history, societies and cultures of GJ 237b. The game that is being played in that room is not something that you can play, or even understand.

Do not enter the room. Don't look at it, either.

Ending Play

When someone opens the door, they are the human explorers that have arrived on GJ 237b. The game ends immediately. We do not play out the catastrophe.