

Archipelago

A story game of destinies

Second edition, playtest version

By Matthijs Holter, 2007-2009

Thanks to:

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🌀 About the game

Archipelago is a story/role-playing game where each player controls a major character. Player take turns directing and playing out a part of their character's story, leading them towards their selected point of destiny, while other players interact with and influence that story.

Who is this game for?

If you like the story-telling part of games, and enjoy the creative challenge and inspiration that comes from working with others, this game is for you. If you like tactical mechanics, resource management, or player-vs-player competition, there are other games that might work better for you.

The vibe I'm aiming for

I wrote this game trying to capture the feeling of Ursula K. LeGuin's «Earthsea» books. I wanted a game of grand destinies, that at the same time had time to dwell on the details of plants, words, everyday lives. I wanted a game that was about great conflicts, but at the same time treated its characters' stories with respect. I wanted not a steel framework, but a spider web of thin threads creating subtler stories.

This game works best if you play it slow. Sometimes, the best thing to do is wait a little and see how things unfold. Ged stayed with Ogion for years, learning about the old language, the names of flower petals and bugs. There's time to let the characters evolve.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Take your time.

Changes from the previous version

- The wording of the ritual phrases has been changed; some phrases have been added; and the effect of some of them is different. Yes, that means you need to re-read them all if you've played the game before.
- Fate and resolution cards have been added. Fate cards make ownership more active, and get the map more into play. Resolution cards are more fun than just red vs black cards.
- There are a lot of little clarifications and expansions – on creating characters, creating destiny points, using the map, active ownership etc.
- I've included a section on group dynamics from Wikipedia, along with my comments relating to Archipelagoan design.

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♻ The game in play – a brief overview

On your turn, you'll set up and direct a scene where you narrate the actions and thoughts of your character. All the players (both you and the others) will narrate the other parts of the fiction – for example, the actions of other characters, descriptions of the environment, events beyond your character's control etc. Since it's your scene, you should help activate the other players, and get them to help you make the sort of story you like. Ask them to play specific characters, control certain events etc.

At the start of the session, you'll have chosen a *point of destiny* written for your character by another player. This is an event that your character will experience during this session. You'll be guiding your character's story toward that point, with the help of the other players.

On your turn, you can draw a Fate card if you want some random input in your story. This card will then be interpreted by another player.

In addition, there are some things you can always do, no matter who's turn it is.

- If you're dissatisfied with something that another player narrates, because you don't think it fits into the story, you can tell that player: «Try a different way». («Prøv en annen måte»).
- If another player narrates something you'd like to hear about, you can say «Describe that in detail». («Beskriv det i detalj»).
- If another player narrates something you'd like to add more dramatic tension to, you can say «That might not be quite so easy.» («Det er kanskje ikke fullt så enkelt.»)
- If another player has finished narrating, and you'd like to hear some more right away, you can say «How about a follow-up scene?» («Hva med en oppfølgingsscene?»)
- Finally, if you have a small episode you want to narrate right after another player finishes narrating, you can say «I'd like an interlude after that». («Jeg vil gjerne ha et mellomspill etterpå»).

Some players have *ownership of* certain elements of the fiction – such as magic, geography and culture. That means they have a limited veto power when these things are mentioned in narration. In addition, they'll be making up random events about these things when they're asked to interpret Fate cards.

♻️ Setting up the game

The first time you play, you'll need to do two things: Define the setting and create your characters. The setting you define as a group; characters are created individually, but you will want to talk to each other while creating them – to get feedback, to make sure you're more or less on the same page, and just for fun.

Defining the setting

You should decide on one of two options: Either use an existing setting, or define a new one.

Using an existing setting

If you're using an existing setting, you should find a map for that setting and place it on the table. Talk about the setting a little bit – what's cool about it? How does it all work, again?

Set the game in a time or place that's not thoroughly defined in the setting. You want some space to explore and invent new places, people and cultures.

Decide what elements of the setting are central, and need someone to take *ownership* of them – someone who can say what fits and what doesn't.

Example: In Ursula LeGuin's Earthsea books, areas of ownership might be magic, culture and geography. If a player narrates something that's completely at odds with the books' descriptions of magic, someone should have the power to say: «That's just not right».

You might want to set the game in a time period a few hundred years before the events described in the books. Otherwise, you'd easily end up just retelling the stories of the books' major characters Ged and Tenar, and having to make your stories fit in with theirs.

It's often a good idea to expand the setting a little, to help the group feel more invested in the setting. As you do when defining a new setting, you can create new islands with names and descriptions.

Defining a new setting

Talk about what sort of setting you want. High fantasy or science fiction are suitable genres, though if you want to experiment with other genres, go ahead.

Decide what elements of the setting are central, and need someone to take *ownership* of them – someone who can say what fits and what doesn't. This is to make sure that the setting has integrity, that there's a unifying vision for these elements. Decide who owns what. Ownership is a responsibility, so make sure the right people own the right things.

Grab a big piece of paper to draw a map on. To begin with, this map will help you get a common vision of the setting – it's a dramatic focus. Later, you'll be using it to mark where the characters are. The map will affect, and will be affected by, the Fate cards you draw during the game.

Those who want to draw, get a pen or pencil and start drawing locations. You should draw at least five locations, more if you're going to play more than one session.

Leave some space on the side of the map for noting down names of characters that appear

during the game.

Give the locations names. Name other things on the map, too – oceans, currents, winds, villages, star clusters, deserts...

Give a few short descriptions of some of the locations. Provide one or two details, but make sure a *lot* is undefined and open for exploration.

During this stage of the game, the usual rules for narration apply except «*That might not be quite so easy*». That means anyone can say «*Try a different way*» or «*Describe that in detail*». It also means players with ownership can try to veto things.

Example: You decide to go for a science fiction setting where your spaceship has crashed on a foreign planet that's almost completely covered in water, and your characters only know a few islands. You decide that the areas of ownership are geography, technology, culture – and the submarine environment, which you have a feeling may become important later.

The group names a few islands - «Big Nose», «Cedaal», «Pariolish», six more. One of the oceans gets the name «Silvery Ocean».

Someone says Cedaal is where you crashed; it has big cities, shining like the sun. You say «Yes, at night it's the only visible island – all the others are dark».

Someone else says «Everyone there looks like little green men». You don't like that, so you say «Try a different way». They say «People there look like humans, only slightly taller and darker».

You say «Shining cities... Describe that in detail». The player describes how the city is based on subterranean generators, and the buildings are some sort of organic crystalline structure.

Creating characters

You should each think about what sort of character you want to play. Think out loud! Find out where your character comes from, and describe a few people that are important to them or their story. You should have the start of a story in mind; don't create characters that will just stay in one place and do nothing. Remember that these characters will be bearers of destiny; they're figures of note, major players, fated for greatness or tragedy. They might start out small and insignificant, or mighty and powerful, but they'll be in the center of events.

Example: You're playing in the Earthsea setting. You want a character that has been mighty, but has fallen. He's called Albiorth. You tell the group, and another player suggests that your character has been ostracized – thrown off his island of birth. You go with the idea, and tell the group that your character was rich and powerful, but had many enemies. Now he's alone in a boat, and very, very angry.

Each character should have an *indirect relationship* to at least one other character. An indirect relationship means both characters are *emotionally* tied to a third character, event, place or other element. These ties must be meaningful and strong to your character. You can figure this out for each character in turn, or after some or all the characters are done, but you must have the relationships in place before the game begins.

Special tip: If there's a central conflict in the session – a major feud between factions, a war, a race for a sacred object – it's a good idea to have an indirect relationship through that. These conflicts tend to come into play, and characters who are involved tend to become central to the story.

Example: After talking with the others a bit, you decide that Albiorth was ostracized by his brother

– *who's married to Herran, one of the other characters. Albiorth and Herran now have an indirect relationship.*

Herran participated in the Theocratic Revolution in her youth; another character, Pelk, was badly hurt in that same revolution. Herran and Pelk now have an indirect relationship.

Take some time to think about the other characters. Note down a few *flags* you've noticed – things about their personality or history that seem to say «play me out!» These are excellent for when you write destiny points later.

Example: Herran has been struggling to become a Daughter of the Church. That's a good flag – anything to do with that struggle should bring interesting play. You note it down as a flag. Harran also has a pet bird; perhaps not so much story material, so you don't note that down as a flag.

After creating characters, each of you should put a playing piece – a coin, a token, a miniature figure – on the map to show where your character is. Make sure all pieces are different.

For many, it's helpful to have a list of names that can be used for secondary characters during the game. Write such a list together – about ten male and ten female names should help you get started.

☞ Starting the session

Each session, before you start playing, you each need a *destiny point* for your character. This is an event that will occur in the life of the character – something dramatic, significant, perhaps something that changes their life.

You'll create destiny points for each other. Everyone writes down one destiny point for each of the other players' characters – so if you're playing with four other people, you'll be writing down four different destiny points, one for each of them.

These destiny points are things that would be interesting to hear about, and of some (perhaps major) importance to the character. You're free to do anything you want when writing them; after all, the player is free to ignore your destiny point if they want. Some players have called them «undiscussed creative space» - they can be used as is, or thrown away.

The best destiny points are often those that surprise and challenge the player. Here are some tips:

- A destiny point might show the character from an unexpected side. For a pacifist character, «You kill three people with a found gun» is a scary and interesting destiny point. We'll all be wondering how that's going to happen.
- A destiny point might kill darlings and be anticlimactic challenges. For a character who's spent two sessions looking for her long-lost father, who she believes to be a Supreme Technomancer, a destiny point saying «You find your father, who works as a shopkeeper in some anonymous suburb» would certainly be a twist. We'll be wondering how the character reacts to that.
- A destiny point might give the character a chance to really shine. For a character who's been second-in-command for a long time, a destiny point saying «You prove your competence in a dramatic battle and are given command of your own special unit» would make us all cheer for the character.

When everyone's done, choose one of the destiny points the other players suggested for your character.

(For a two- or three- player game, each player writes down three destiny points for the other player's character(s)).

Example: You're playing with two others – one plays a young boy looking for his brother at sea; the other plays an old necromancer. For the first character you write down «He finds his brother dying of thirst in the West Reaches». For the second you write «He opens the portal to the Land of the Dead».

You're playing Albiorth, an ostracized, wealthy man. The others suggest «He finds an ancient pirate treasure» and «He returns to wreak terrible revenge on his town of birth». You choose the second destiny point.

When you've chosen your destiny, write it down on a sheet of paper and fold it up so that the others can see it at all times. Alternatively, everyone can just note it down on a sheet of their own for easy reference. However you choose to do it, it's important that everyone can read your destiny point at all times.

Note: If any of the destiny points affect more than one major character, *all* the players

involved must agree to use it.

Example: If another player had the lost brother as a character, the destiny point «He finds his brother dying of thirst in the West Reaches» would have to be approved by both players – otherwise, the player would have to choose another destiny point.

✎ Using destiny points

The destiny point is one of the most important parts of the game. It's what keeps your stories tight, what stops them from just flowing out and ending nowhere. You know what your character's destiny is for this session – play towards it! In each scene you'll be steering your character towards their destiny, and on the third or fourth turn you play, they should face that destiny.

Other players should help you get to the destiny point – by playing relevant secondary characters, describing fitting events etc.

After your destiny point has been played out, you may choose to let your story rest for this session. If so, you still participate in the others' stories as always, but when it's your turn to portray your character, just skip your turn.

When all characters have faced their destiny points, it's probably a good time to end the session.

Example: In your third scene, Albiorth disembarks on a small, barren island and meets a little girl. In an earlier scene, another player described how this girl was the carrier of a horrible disease. Albiorth is supposed to «wreak terrible revenge on his town of birth» - so you narrate how he takes the girl with him on a small boat and sails toward the town that ostracized him. His plan is to infect them with the disease.

☞ What do you do on your turn?

On your turn, when your character is in focus, you do these things.

Set the stage

Describe where your character is and what's going on. You're the director, so make sure to ask other players to describe settings, portray specific characters etc.

The first time you play, you should pay special attention to this part. It's easy to feel that you're responsible for providing all the content. You're not; you're responsible for providing the starting structure. You don't have to decide where you are at the start of the scene, or what happens – but you have to make sure that *someone does*.

Example: I'm starting my scene, but have no idea what to do, and the other players are looking at me expectantly. I'm going to ask for their help. «My character is in... um... Morten, where am I?»

Morten thinks for a moment, then points to the map. «You're in the swamp, right here. You're looking for something you dreamed about last night.»

I have no idea what my character dreamed about, but that's okay, we'll find out. «The swamp, okay. Monica, could you play the weird little boy that we met last session?» Monica nods. I don't know what that boy is doing there, but again, we'll find out. I start narrating for my character.

«I'm wading through the swamp, swatting flies left and right...»

If you feel like it, you can also give more specific directions for the scene. This is entirely optional, but can be fun. My group sometimes specifies what techniques to use, or *how* things should be narrated. Here are some examples:

- «Play out this scene as a flashback or dream sequence».
- «This scene is identical to the previous one, but seen from a different character's viewpoint».
- «There should be no conflict at all in this scene. It's all about being in the moment, immersing, describing».
- «In this scene, the Emperor will try to look dignified, but a series of silly accidents will make him lose face».

Move your playing piece, if necessary

In order to help other players remember where your character is at all times, it's a good idea to show the character's location on the map. Make sure to move your playing piece when the character changes location.

Example: Since I'm in the swamp, I place my playing piece there.

Portray your character

You control your character's actions, thoughts and dialogue at all times. The only exception is when someone tells you «That *might not be quite so easy*» – then whoever gets to narrate the outcome of the situation can narrate what your character does, and what happens to them. Nobody can say «*Try a different way*» when you narrate about your character.

Draw a Fate card

Once every session, you can decide to draw a Fate card on your turn. These cards are for when you want or need some narrative random help – if you find your character's story is floundering, for example, or if you think the plot you're following needs an unexpected twist.

The Fate cards are often tied to the map, or to setting elements that someone owns (i. e., ownership). When you draw a card, you *don't look at it*, but give it to someone else to interpret. Their job is to make sure fate throws you – either just your character, or all the characters – a curveball.

When someone interprets a card that talks about an owned element, that means *their* owned element comes into play.

Example: You draw a Fate card and give it to a player who has ownership of the magical weather and atmosphere. The card says «The element you own is interfering with this character's desires, wishes or needs». The player describes how your character, on her way to the City of Love, is picked up by a magical storm that carries her to a desert island far away. They also describe how this storm affects several other major and minor characters.

Finish the scene

When you feel ready, you can end your turn and let the next player take their turn. It's important to remember that nobody else can tell you when to end your turn – it's completely up to you, so you have a lot of space and freedom to narrate in your own style and pace.

☞ What else can you do?

There are some things you can *always* do – whether it's your turn or not. Always have these options in mind – the game relies on your participation when it's *not* your turn.

Say «Try a different way»

If someone narrates something you don't think fits in the story or the situation, for whatever reason, you can say «*Try a different way*». They then have to narrate something else – a variation on what they just said, or something completely different. You can specify exactly what you want different - «stop being silly», for example, or «I don't want my character in jail».

Don't be afraid to use this rule. In the beginning you might find yourself using it quite often; but after a while, when everyone starts getting a feel for what sort of narration fits in with the group's expectations, you'll probably find that you don't feel the need for this rule so much. It's a way of drawing a chalk line, saying to the other players: «This is cool, this isn't».

Example: Someone else says «The man who fell overboard comes out of the water again. His body is covered in blood, and he has a huge dead shark under his arm.» This is a bit over the top in your opinion, so you say «Try a different way – can we drop the shark?» The other player nods. «Okay, he comes up covered in blood. 'I had to fight off some sharks', he says.»

Say «Describe that in detail»

When you want to hear more about what someone just narrated, you can say «*Describe that in detail*». This is a great tool to make sure you're all telling a story together, not just throwing out a synopsis. It also gives you the opportunity to test what the group wants to hear – if you gloss over an area you're unsure about, you'll know it's important to the others if they ask you to describe details.

A great tip for describing detail is: Don't be creative. Don't try to make things up. Just pretend you're visiting the place, seeing things around you, and describe what you see. The gleam of a button on a uniform, the short yellow hair of the young, steely-eyed guard... Often it doesn't really matter what details you describe, as long as you describe something.

Example: You say «The master talks about some rituals.» Another player says: «Describe that in detail!» You say: «Okay... He says: 'The water ritual that binds two people in marriage demands that they both carry a small bottle of water; spring water for the woman, well water for the man...'»

Say «That might not be quite so easy»

If there's a challenge or a conflict, you can say «*That might not be quite so easy*». This can only be done *once per turn*. The current player decides what the character is trying to do right now. It's good if you pose it as a question - «Can Albiorth swim across the lake?», «Can Mira convince the Emperor that the disease is deadly?», «Is Arlo able to kill the seagull that contains his wife's spirit?» Then the current player selects another player to draw a resolution card and interpret it. This is important – you *never* interpret a resolution card for your own character!

Example: Albiorth's player picks you to draw a resolution card. It says «Yes, and...» You decide that not only does Albiorth swim across the lake, he discovers a sunken treasure along the way.

Example: Mira's player picks you to draw a resolution card. It says «No, and...» You decide that not only does the Emperor not believe Mira, he becomes so infuriated at her insolence that he sends out his soldiers to kill her family.

Say «A follow-up scene, please»

If the player ends his/her turn, and you'd like to hear more of their story right away, you can ask them if they want to do a follow-up scene. If they choose to do so, they take another turn right away. However, they have to skip their next turn!

There can't be more than one follow-up scene in a row. So once the follow-up scene is over, it's definitely the next player's turn.

Say «I'd like an interlude after that»

If you have something you *really* want to narrate, that would fit just right after the current turn has ended, you can ask for an interlude. If the group agrees, you get a minute after the current scene has ended to narrate. Make it short – it's not your turn, you're just squeezing in with a cool, brief moment!

There can't be more than one interlude scene in a row, either. When your interlude is done, the next player takes their turn.

Create or play a secondary character

You can play a suitable supporting or secondary character at any time – either because someone asks you to, or because you feel like it. The current player can say «Try a different way», of course, which means you either change your portrayal of the character, or just play a different character. Nobody owns secondary characters – anyone can take them over at any point.

Describe events and the environment

At any time you can narrate events, describe the surroundings, et cetera.

🌀 Ownership

Some players have *ownership* of certain elements of the fiction – such as magic, geography and culture. You decide what elements require ownership when you choose or define the setting.

Example: When playing in the Earthsea setting, the group decided that magic, geography and culture all required ownership. You define magic as the Balance, the Pattern, dragons, Pelnish lore, witch magic, weather magic – all those things. Geography covers the map, the islands, weather, plants and animals of the Archipelago. Culture is defined as literature, music, history – and also hierarchies, societal norms and rules.

Be an active owner

Everybody likes a little setting detail. When you see an opportunity to describe your element, do so. It can be as little as a sentence or a phrase, or you can draw up maps and give a short explanation of the local physics. Try to do some active ownership at least once every session.

Fate

When you're asked to interpret a Fate card, that card might ask you to narrate something about the element you own. You're free to interpret this as you want.

Example: A Fate card says «An unbalance or disharmony appears in your element. It might seem small or large; it might not be what it seems.» Your element is Geography. You decide this means that there's a tremor in one of the central islands, shaking the houses and frightening the goats. What this will lead to later... we don't know yet.

Veto

If someone narrates something that you disagree with within an element you own, you can veto their narration. This is something you can do for example if the narration contradicts existing knowledge, if it dilutes your vision of the element, or if it changes the element in a way you don't think works.

Example: Another player narrates how a young goatherd throws an enormous fireball at a pirate ship. You say «Veto. That just doesn't feel right. Who taught him that?»

Note that a veto is different from saying «*Try a different way*». A veto shouldn't be used just to reflect your personal taste in narration and plot – it's meant to make sure that the integrity of the setting is intact. It's a responsibility you have toward the group.

You're free to discuss the veto with the other players, if you want; however, the final decision is yours, and yours alone, and you don't need to explain it to the group if you don't want to. Just say «no, sorry, I'm vetoing that», and go on with the game.

🌀 Important techniques

To make the game work, the players should understand and use the following techniques during play. These are mostly basic skills for improvisation and group storytelling.

Accept input. When someone says «such and such happens», always try to accept it into your narration. If you're not sure how to do this, start your answer with «yes, and...» and go from there.

Example: Someone says: «Your character trips over a rock and starts tumbling down the hill!» You answer: «Yes, and while he's rolling, his shoulder strikes a rock hard. He yells out in pain.»

Provide input. Don't wait for other people to ask you to portray characters or describe things – just jump right in when you feel like it. Don't force it, but if you have an idea, talk first and think afterwards. Free your ass and your mind will follow, as a wise person must have said at some point.

Ask for input. If you're stuck in your narration, and just don't know exactly what to say or do, ask for input from the other players.

Example: You're not sure what happens after the tumble, so you say: «Um, ideas, anyone?» One of the players says: «A young man says. 'Are you hurt, master?' He helps you get up. His eyes have no irises.» Suddenly you have something to work on.

Know when to talk and when to be quiet. Don't push it. If you feel like you have to perform, to be supersmart and creative and original, you'll probably end up with weird, stilted or clichéd narration. Better to sit back and relax, and talk when you feel like it. Remember, even when it's your turn, you don't have to do all the work.

Open your story. If you're talking all the time on your turn, providing all the detail and plot, describing all the secondary characters, and never stopping for breath – it's going to be very hard for anyone else to influence your story. Take a break, ask for input, give the other players secondary characters to play.

Avoid big time jumps. In a game like this, the characters' stories can easily get interwoven. If you then suddenly decide your next scene should take place ten years later, it can be hard for the other players to match their stories to yours. Check with the other players to see if they're okay with such jumps.

Don't steal other players' destiny points. Be very wary of this: You usually don't want other players to narrate your destiny points, nor should you usually narrate theirs. If you find yourself doing this, check with the other players if it's okay.

Keep the story about the characters. Sometimes secondary characters have a life of their own. That's okay; but if you find yourself in epic scenes where none of the main characters are active, it's time to kill your darlings – sometimes literally.

Fate cards

Somebody important to this character faces dire trouble because of the element you own – life-threatening illness, bankruptcy, doubt in their faith or similar.	This character does something rash that causes them a lot of trouble with the element you own. An unwise sexual liaison; insulting an ally; destruction of property.
An area on the map is threatened. An attack by enemies, a natural disaster, a change from within or similar.	Someone from this character's past suddenly appears in an area on the map, with a request or demand.
The element you own is interfering with this character's desires, wishes or needs.	Something important is stolen from this character by someone connected to the element you own.
The element you own changes allegiance, motivation or direction in a surprising way.	This character receives an unwanted and troublesome gift from an area on the map.
The element you own claims an old debt from this character.	This character makes an enemy in the element you own.

✎ Resolution cards

These generic resolution cards are identical to those printed in the Norwegian Style book. There, they're used for the game Itras By. Feel free to use them for other games, if you like.

Yes, but... The character succeeds, but something completely unrelated goes wrong, for the character or someone she cares about.	Yes, but only if... The character can get what she wants – but only if she chooses to make a certain sacrifice.
Yes, and... The character succeeds, and achieves more than she expected. Perhaps even a bit too much...	Yes, but... The character succeeds, but the consequences of the success are completely different from what was expected.
No, but... The character fails, but another positive thing happens instead, unrelated to what she was aiming for.	Yes, but... The character succeeds, but there's a tiny detail that doesn't go quite as planned.
Help is needed. The character ends up understanding that she needs the help of someone not currently in the scene to achieve this aim.	No, and... The character fails, and something unrelated also goes wrong.

☞ Appendix: Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing

This text is taken from Wikipedia. I'm including it here because I think it says a lot about how people work together as a group when playing role-playing and story games. When reading it, I kept thinking about how Archipelago is designed. I've included my own notes in italics.

The Forming – Storming – Norming – Performing model of group development was first proposed by Bruce Tuckman in 1965, who maintained that these phases are all necessary and inevitable in order for the team to grow, to face up to challenges, to tackle problems, to find solutions, to plan work, and to deliver results. This model has become the basis for subsequent models of Team development and team dynamics and a management theory frequently used to describe the behavior of existing teams. It has also taken a firm hold in the field of experiential education since in many outdoor education centers team building and leadership development are key goals.

Forming

In the first stages of team building, the forming of the team takes place. The team meets and learns about the opportunity and challenges, and then agrees on goals and begins to tackle the tasks. Team members tend to behave quite independently. They may be motivated but are usually relatively uninformed of the issues and objectives of the team. Team members are usually on their best behavior but very focused on themselves. Mature team members begin to model appropriate behavior even at this early phase. Sharing the knowledge of the concept of "Teams - Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing" is extremely helpful to the team.

Supervisors of the team tend to need to be directive during this phase.

The forming stage of any team is important because in this stage the members of the team get to know one another, exchange some personal information, and make new friends. This is also a good opportunity to see how each member of the team works as an individual and how they respond to pressure.

People who know one another will often make better groups. This is one of the reasons you should play with your friends, or people you want to make friends with; it'll make for better games. And, of course, enrich your social life as a human being.

If you have a group of friends who know each other and have played some games before, you might already be past the stage of forming. However, if the group gains or loses a member, you'll probably find that the social dynamics have changed. I find that the group needs to re-form as members come and go.

Note the way the article talks about the role of the supervisor, and how it changes from stage to stage. In the forming stage of a campaign or game, it's good to have a strong GM or facilitator.

Storming

Every group will then enter the storming stage in which different ideas compete for consideration. The team addresses issues such as what problems they are really supposed to

solve, how they will function independently and together and what leadership model they will accept. Team members open up to each other and confront each other's ideas and perspectives. In some cases storming can be resolved quickly. In others, the team never leaves this stage. The maturity of some team members usually determines whether the team will ever move out of this stage. Some team members will focus on minutiae to evade real issues.

The storming stage is necessary to the growth of the team. It can be contentious, unpleasant and even painful to members of the team who are averse to conflict. Tolerance of each team member and their differences needs to be emphasized. Without tolerance and patience the team will fail. This phase can become destructive to the team and will lower motivation if allowed to get out of control.

Supervisors of the team during this phase may be more accessible but tend to still need to be directive in their guidance of decision-making and professional behavior. The groups will therefore resolve their differences and group members will be able to participate with one another more comfortably and they won't feel that they are being judged in any way and will therefore share their own opinions and views.

To me, this stage is about finding the right system, setting, game. Do we want to play light-hearted barbarian fantasy, or social realism? Do we want a GM, or distributed GM functions?

The comment about minutiae is telling. Have you ever been in a group where players would rather debate different games' combat systems, than actually talk about what they want to do and achieve during play?

I think that the more open the group members can be at this stage – the more we're able to tell each other what we actually want, what we like, who we are – the more fun and depth we can get out of the game.

Norming

At some point, the team may enter the norming stage. Team members adjust their behavior to each other as they develop work habits that make teamwork seem more natural and fluid. Team members often work through this stage by agreeing on rules, values, professional behavior, shared methods, working tools and even taboos. During this phase, team members begin to trust each other. Motivation increases as the team gets more acquainted with the project.

Teams in this phase may lose their creativity if the norming behaviors become too strong and begin to stifle healthy dissent and the team begins to exhibit groupthink.

Supervisors of the team during this phase tend to be participative more than in the earlier stages. The team members can be expected to take more responsibility for making decisions and for their professional behavior.

As team members get to know each other better, their views of each other begin to change. The team feels a sense of achievement for getting so far, however some members can begin to feel threatened by the amount of responsibility they have been given. They would try to resist the pressure and revert to storming again.

Read that again and think about Archipelago. Half the ritual phrases are about norming, telling each other how we want this game to work. «Try a different way». «Describe that in detail». «That might not be quite so easy». And, of course, the veto rules for ownership.

The points on trust and healthy dissent are very important, I think. Trust your co-players, and let them disagree with you if they feel they must. Again, that's incorporated into Archipelago's rules and phrases.

Notice how, at this stage, the GM or facilitator has become a player. The game is GM-less, or as some would say, GM-ful.

Performing

Some teams will reach the performing stage. These high-performing teams are able to function as a unit as they find ways to get the job done smoothly and effectively without inappropriate conflict or the need for external supervision. Team members have become interdependent. By this time they are motivated and knowledgeable. The team members are now competent, autonomous and able to handle the decision-making process without supervision. Dissent is expected and allowed as long as it is channeled through means acceptable to the team.

Supervisors of the team during this phase are almost always participative. The team will make most of the necessary decisions. Even the most high-performing teams will revert to earlier stages in certain circumstances. Many long-standing teams will go through these cycles many times as they react to changing circumstances. For example, a change in leadership may cause the team to revert to storming as the new people challenge the existing norms and dynamics of the team.

To me, this is what happens when you've played with a group and a game for a while. You start dropping the rules and procedures, making them up on the fly if you want to play with some structures, losing them again when they're not needed or wanted. Note how a change in the setup of the group – a new facilitator/ host, new members – sometimes means you need to rethink and rebuild some structures, to fit the new individuals and dynamics.

Further developments: Adjourning and transforming

Tuckman later added a fifth phase, adjourning, that involves completing the task and breaking up the team. Others call it the phase for mourning.

A team that lasts may transcend to a transforming phase of achievement. Transformational management can produce major changes in performance through synergy and is considered to be more far-reaching than transactional management.

🌀 Appendix: The rules, short version

On your turn:

You must...

- Set the stage – give initial directions to the other players
- Move your playing piece, if necessary
- Portray your character
- Finish your scene when you're ready

You can...

- Draw a fate card (only once per session)

On anyone's turn, including your own:

You can...

- Create or play a secondary character
- Describe events and the environment
- Say «Try a different way»
- Say «Describe that in detail»
- Say «That might not be quite so easy» (can happen only once per turn)
- Say «A follow-up scene, please» (can happen only once per turn)
- Say «I'd like an interlude after that» (can happen only once per turn)
- Veto narration related to elements you own, if you feel it's necessary for the integrity of the vision