

Radiance

Contents



Introduction	3
Glossary	5
Of What is Needed	9
Of the World and Its Elements	9
Of Activities within the World	10
Of Aspects as they Pertain to Elements Within an Activity	12
Of Redirecting an Activity	13
Of How Redirections are Regulated	14
Of Radiance	15
Of What Happens When an Activity has Finished	16
Of Questions and their Answers	17
Endnote	21
Index	23

Radiance

Radiance

Introduction

I decided to write *Radiance*, while my other book *Defiance* was being proofread. My goals for *Radiance* were simple: to make sure it can be learned quickly, and to make sure it creates a holistic story experience by steering away from the kind of story-telling which is character driven. Aside from an attempt to create a method for collaborative storytelling, *Radiance* is also my way of trying to create something that feels quasi-pagan, that takes a more primordial, and less theoretical, stance on what constitutes a story. In the end, it will be up to you to decide whether or not I have reached those goals, and whether or not *Radiance* has met your expectations.

Those of you who are familiar with role-playing games will notice some similarities between these games and *Radiance*. I like to think of *Radiance* as having a resemblance to these games, but I'm not entirely convinced that *Radiance* is a role-playing game. Whatever *Radiance* may be, I feel that its readers and critics are more than capable of deciding for themselves.

It is customary when publishing a book to offer gratitude to those who have helped and inspired you, and I see no reason to avoid this custom. Therefore, I want to offer my gratitude to story-games.com, rpg.net and indie-rpgs.com (a.k.a "The Forge"). I also want to thank everyone who helped me write *Defiance*. Each and every one of you has helped me write this book by opening my mind to new possibilities and methods for storytelling.

- M. J. Graham, 2009

Radiance

Radiance

Glossary

Activity – An event that forms a scene in a story. Activities contain elements and aspects that are engaged with the activity. An activity differs from an action in two ways, characters perform actions, but are involved in activities, and a scene does not take the form of an action. For example, two lovers talking in a café is an activity; stirring sugar into a cup of coffee is an action performed by a person within that activity. A series of related activities makes a story.

Aspect – Elements have aspects that occur at certain times, to certain characters, under certain circumstances. Aspects are never permanent and depend entirely on how the element is being used within the activity. For example, a keg of beer might have the aspect of large if a person has to carry it, but small if the same person tries to hide behind it.

Attending Narrator – Any narrator who is not a lead narrator is an attending narrator. Attending narrators offer suggestions and redirections, and sometimes play the parts of characters within an activity. There are no attending narrators between descriptions of activities.

Character – an element within an activity that demonstrates intention or something that could be mistaken for intention. Characters are usually imagined persons with minds, but they can just as easily be imagined things which seem to have intentions: the car that stubbornly refuses to start when you're late for work, the glass of water that calls you to drink from it, or the watch that always does its best to be lost are all possible characters.

Conclusion – The final activity in a story.

Element – A component of a world. Elements can be explicit or implicit. The totality of all elements within a story forms a world.

Radiance

Ending – this is where an activity is going. Some endings can be thought of as goals or objectives. But not all endings are goals or objectives as not all activities have minds within them. An activity's ending can change through redirection. Not to be confused with a story's conclusion.

Lead Narrator – The narrator currently describing an activity within a story to the attending narrators. There are no lead narrators between descriptions of activities.

Narrator – A person who participates in *Radiance* by telling parts of a story, making suggestions, listening offering redirections, or playing the parts of characters. There are four narrators for every game of *Radiance*. Participants who are not narrating may still listen, make suggestions, and play the parts of certain characters, but they do not qualify as narrators.

Radiance – A narrator who helps make a story unique and fascinating for the other narrators is often rewarded with the quality of being radiant by those same narrators. Narrators who are radiant have more control over which redirections are introduced into a story.

Redirection – A change in the direction of where an activity is heading. Redirections are introduced by attending narrators and can alter an activity's ending.

Session – A length of time, typically lasting between one and three hours, in which narrators are telling a story. Many stories can last over several sessions.

Sortition – A method for determining a random outcome by drawing beads or lots. In *Radiance* narrators draw beads from bags to determine whether some redirection become part of a story.

Radiance

World – This is the imagined place where all the events of a story happen. It can be an imagined planet, but it can equally be an imagined universe, galaxy, continent, country, city, building or room. Although a world is an imagined place, it need not be an imaginary one. Your hometown can be a world if you imagine the events of a story happening there.

World Candle – A candle lit at the beginning of each session to signify the radiance of the world. Narrators' own candles are lit from the World Candle when other narrators deem their contribution as interesting and unique.

Radiance

Radiance

Of What is Needed

Radiance is a way of creating stories with three of your friends. Together you will become a band of narrators collaborating on telling new stories. You will each need a pencil, some writing paper, a small opaque bag, ten red beads and ten white beads. You will also need five candles (place one in front of each narrator and one in the centre between the narrators). These candles symbolize the radiance of the narrators and the world which they will create. (As with any naked flame, please be careful when using these candles).

You will also need a place where all of you feel comfortable. Some people enjoy an audience listening to the stories they are creating, whilst others prefer to just have the other narrators present. It all comes down to personal preference. As for time, you'll probably need to create your stories over the course of a few sessions, and the length of each session will vary depending on how much time you have and what you feel is right for you. An easy way to decide how long your sessions should be is for each narrator to say how long they want most movies to be. Much longer than the usual time you and the other narrators like movies to last and you may find yourselves becoming distracted or tired, while much shorter sessions may not provide you with the time needed to give the story sufficient momentum. As for how many sessions there should be, I recommend three to five, but you may find that another amount works better for you.

Of The World and Its Elements

Before beginning the first story, the narrators should discuss the world where the story unfolds. The world is a clearing in the narrators' shared storytelling experience. This clearing is the space where the mood, setting and plot of the story manifests and it is created when the narrators talk about the potentials of the upcoming story. For example, a band of narrators whose discussion brings forth the potential for a dark fairytale opens up a clearing in their shared experience, in which a cer-

Radiance

tain type of mood, setting and plot is able to appear. Once a world has been created, the narrators can fill it with most of the available places, histories, feelings, prophecies, traditions, rituals, festivals, technologies, miracles, superstitions, cultures, societies and landscapes which can be referred to in the story. These references are not an extensive list of everything that is available within the world. New references will inevitably be introduced by the narrators and used as the story progresses. These references are called the elements of the world, or elements for short, and it is the totality of these elements which form a story's setting.

As with any clearing, the world only shows up fully when the narrators are able to see the world's edge. The edge of the world represents the boundary between world and not-world. The world's edge is created when the narrators decide what constitutes the world of their story and what does not. In this way, the narrators are able to perceive when their story is in the world they imagined, and when it has fallen over the edge of that world. Narrators should try to keep their story within the confines of the world they have created, so that what elements are available for each narrator will be readily grasped.

If you and the other narrators enjoy using this world, you may return to it for future stories, or you can choose to create other worlds.

*Now that the world has been created, you should light
the centre candle.
This will be the World Candle.*

Of Activities within the World

At the beginning of each session place three white beads and one red bead into the small bag. Each narrator then takes turns drawing one bead from the bag. The first narrator to draw the red bead is the lead narrator and narrates the first scene's activity. The scene is over when the activity has finished, and the narrator to the right of the lead narrator

Radiance

becomes the new lead narrator for the next scene. Any narrator who is not the lead narrator is considered to be an attending narrator.

Each scene consists of one primary activity narrated by the lead narrator for the duration of the scene. Activities can be physical or mental. They can be carried out by persons, objects, locations, events, countries, epochs, families, organisations, and so on. For example: *a balloon floating towards an old abandoned farmhouse; a family bribing a government official; a priest contemplating his vows; and a famine spreading across a continent* are all activities. Lead narrators can use the elements presented when they were creating the world, or those that were revealed during earlier narration, to help them decide on a particular activity to narrate. Earlier activities can also be a source of inspiration.

When I use the term activity in *Radiance*, I intend for it to mean an endeavour in which one or more characters are involved. In contrast, an action is something a character does as part of an activity. For example, an avalanche can be an activity in which hostile rocks (characters) are seeking to harm a group of hikers (characters). The actions of the rocks are to fall bounce, and collide with one another as they move towards the hikers, who will themselves perform actions (run, find cover, stand paralysed with fear). When playing *Radiance* you will not need to test any characters ability to perform an action.

When choosing an activity to narrate, you should have at least one ending in mind for the activity. This ending is what will happen if the activity runs its course without redirection from the attending narrators, and because activities can be redirected, it is possible for their endings to change.(see pages 13 – 14). It does not have to be a goal, and it does not need to demonstrate any will or purpose. The balloon example in the paragraph above illustrates how an activity can have an ending (*arriving at the farmhouse*) without having a goal and without demonstrating will or purpose.

While the lead narrator is describing an activity, it is helpful if everyone else is not only attentive, but also asks questions, raises salient points, offers the occasional reminders, and makes suggestions. It may

Radiance

also be helpful for the lead narrator to confer with the attending narrators.

How much detail should be given when describing an activity is largely a matter of preference. There are, however, some techniques which may prove useful when describing the activity: Don't be vague about where the activity is going. Don't have too many assumptions about where the story is going. Don't assume that the other narrators see the story the way you do. Don't spend too much time explaining, but use this time for description. Don't over-emphasise one possible outcome at the expense of all the other possible outcomes. Leave enough space for the activity to change direction and don't be worried by uncertainty.

You won't need to be overly analytical. Saying why the activity is happening will not be necessary at this point and is usually best avoided. This avoids steering the plot in directions that the other narrators may not want. Your part as the lead narrator is to provide interesting narration, and not to control or influence the other narrators.

Of Aspects as they Pertain to Elements Within an Activity

Aspects are the changing properties of an element as they relate to the current activity being described. For example, the lead narrator describes: *A person running with a bag across their shoulder. The bag is heavy and the ground slippery.* In this example, the heaviness of the bag and the slipperiness of the ground are aspects as they are both relative to the particular activity of running. Had the person running been doing something else, the bag's heaviness and the ground's slipperiness might not have mattered. When any element is used during a story, it will have certain aspects that may become apparent during narration. Some aspects, however, will remain implicit, existing in the imaginations of the narrators, but not expressed in the narration.

Aspects do not have to be a property of physical elements. For example, *her thoughts were fearful and laden with guilt* (the aspect here

Radiance

being fear and guilt). They can also be attributed to the relationships between elements, e.g., *the town hall is near the river*. Remember that aspects only exist in reference to the current situation. The town hall is only near the river when it matters to the activity being narrated and the particular activity allows it to be near. If the activity is a messenger on a motorbike riding from the town hall to the river, the aspect might be near, but not if it were an injured man burdened by a heavy object. In this way the town hall can be both near and far depending on the activity.

Of Redirecting an Activity

Before any activity has been narrated, five red beads and one white bead should be added to the small bag. At this moment, these should be the only beads in the bag.

Any activity can be delayed, diverted, corrupted, or otherwise changed through redirection. A redirection can be introduced at any time by the attending narrators. Only one redirection can be introduced by each of these attending narrators per activity, i.e., there is a maximum of three redirections per activity and each redirection must be introduced by a different attending narrator.

The attending narrators attempting to redirect an activity can confer with one another, but as mentioned previously, each attending narrator can only introduce one redirection, and to avoid confusion these attending narrators should be clear as to the order and time in which the redirections will happen.

Redirections must come in the form of an aspect or as new information. All redirections that are aspects must refer to the elements present within the activity. For example, *there is a wall* is not a redirection, it is merely restating an element already existing within the story, but the *wall is too high* might be a redirection if the activity is going towards an ending that is behind the wall. Redirections that come in the form of new information can be used to create new possibilities for the

Radiance

narrative. For example, the flow of an argument might be redirected by one of the arguers telling her boyfriend that she's pregnant.

Attending narrators do not have to try to redirect an activity, and it is advisable that they only do so when they are likely to make the story more interesting for everyone involved.

Once a redirection has been decided, the attending narrators must then assign it a value from zero to three. The total value assigned to all the redirections for an activity cannot exceed three.

To use an earlier example: a person is running along a wet road with a heavy bag on their shoulder. The attending narrators confer with one another and agree that *the road is slippery, the heavy bag difficult to manoeuvre with and that there's a large Irish wolfhound chasing the running person*. They assign no value to the heavy bag, the two to the large dog and the one to the slippery road.

The lead narrator now has a choice of accepting those redirections and incorporating them into the story or negate them by drawing beads (see next section for more details). Redirections to an activity that become part of the story either by being accepted by the lead narrator or entering into the story through sortition can change the ending of that activity.

Of How Redirections are Regulated

If you are the lead narrator and you refuse to accept a redirection, you will need to draw some beads from the small bag. (At this point the bag should contain five red beads and one white bead). The number of beads drawn by the lead narrator is equal to the value the attending narrators assigned to the redirection. If the lead narrator draws no white beads, he is free to remove the redirection by narrating it out of the story. If a white bead is drawn, however, he must accept the redirection and hand over the narration of the activity to the attending narrator that put forward the redirection.

Radiance

Once beads have been drawn they cannot be returned to the bag until the activity has been completely narrated. A white bead, however, should be added to the bag when lead narration rights are transferred while an activity is still being narrated. This is to ensure that later redirections can still occur, and to allow another narrator to become the lead narrator for the rest of the activity. Regardless of who ends the narration of an activity, it is always the narrator to the left of the activities original lead narrator who become the new lead narrator for the next activity.

In an earlier example, I said that three redirection could be assigned these values: zero to the heavy bag, two to the large dog and one to the slippery road. The lead narrator does not have to draw any beads for the heavy bag (*tired muscles straining, he carries the heavy bag, but shows no sign of slowing down*). The attending narrators then decided to have the slippery road be the next redirection. The lead narrator draws a red bead (*the sole of his boots close to sliding against the wet tarmac, his balance never falters*). There is now four red beads and one white bead in the bag. For the last redirection, the attending narrators ask the lead narrator to draw two beads and he draws a white bead and a red bead (*he hears the chasing dog is getting closer with ever passing second, its deep threatening growl a warning of an impending attack*). At this point the rest of the narration is done by the attending narrator who suggested the dog as a redirection.

Of Radiance

Radiance is a symbol and a measure of a narrator's ability to bring out the unique and fascinating features of a story. Whenever you are impressed by something another narrator says or does, you may light his candle by holding its wick to the World Candle and returning it to its previous position in front of him. A narrator is considered to be radiant, while his candle is lit and at any time while he possesses the quality of being radiant he can add an additional white or red bead to the bag before a draw commences. When he does this he must blow out his

Radiance

candle afterwards, to signify his lose of radiance. These additional beads can only be used for one draw, i.e., you should remove the additional beads from the bag before the next draw.

Last of all concerning radiance: all the narrators can possess radiance at the same time and there is no limit to how many times they can posses it during a session or story.

Of What Happens When an Activity has Finished

Before the next narrator starts to describe the following activity, you should all spend a few minutes discussing the last activity. Talk about what you found intriguing, make some brief and not too detailed suggestions about where the story might go, and reflect on what was revealed about any characters within the last activity. You should not over analyse the previous activity as this may place restrictions on the story.

The next lead narrator is always the one sitting to the left of the lead narrator of the previous activity. If the story has reached a conclusion, you will not need to have another activity narrated and will therefore have no further need for a lead narrator until your next story with *Radiance*.

*You are now ready to for your first session of Radiance.
I hope you enjoy it!*

Radiance

Of Questions and their Answers

This part of the book is my attempt to pre-empt some of the questions which you might have about *Radiance*. I have chosen to write the questions as I imagined you might ask them.

Can we use dice or cards instead of drawing beads?

I chose beads because I wanted to create another game for people who are already playing, or want to play, Defiance (a game which uses different rules for drawing beads). Cards works a good substitute for beads. You can count the red cards as red beads, the black cards as black beads, and just play the cards face down instead of placing them in a bag. Dice are trickier and I have to admit I haven't figured out a way to use them in a way that simulates the drawing of beads. If you figure out a way, I'd be very interested in hearing about it. You may even want to use it, or something similar, for a game that you want to design.

Do I have to use red and white beads?

As long as the beads are different colours and indistinguishable by touch, you can use any colours you like.

How can you have a story without knowing the characters first?

Radiance is my attempt to create a collaborating storytelling method with focus on the character of places, things and events, as well as the more obvious character of persons (i.e., anything vaguely human). I believe that it is the nature of storytelling to imbue 'the elements of the world with character.

I want to create my own characters. Why can't I do that in *Radiance*?

You can create characters in Radiance. You'll create characters when you narrate activities and build a story from those activities. Characters will emerge from your stories as elements of the world.

Radiance

I introduced a character into the story and the other narrators are using him the wrong way. What should I do about this?

When you get to know a character during an activity, you're only seeing how they are during that specific activity at that specific time. Contradictions in behaviour are not necessarily signs of a poorly narrated character. They can also be signs of a character with depth and complexity. Be relaxed about the freedom the other narrators have with the characters you introduced and you may end up pleasantly surprised.

Why don't you give more tips or instructions on how to make a story?

Because I don't think I know more than you do about creating good stories. I certainly don't know more than you do about creating the kind of stories that you enjoy. Besides, there's nothing I can tell you that you won't pick up faster and more completely than by creating your own stories.

The other narrators aren't introducing redirections to the activities I'm narrating. Am I doing something wrong?

As long as they've understood how Radiance works, you're not doing anything wrong. Not having any redirections introduced is a good sign that they want to find out where the activity is going, and part of being a good narrator is knowing how to make an activity interesting.

I want narrative control over an activity. Is it a good idea to introduce redirections that I know will not be accepted by the lead director?

You're unlikely to get narrative control if the other attending narrators don't agree to give your redirection a high value. You also need to consider how you're going to incorporate your redirection into the narrative, should you become the lead narrator. If your redirection is unworkable for the current lead narrator, it won't become any less unworkable if you become the lead narrator.

Radiance

How will we know how much value to assign to a redirection?

Just ask yourselves two questions: how much do I want to add this redirection into the narrative and how important is it for you to be one that end up narrating the redirection into the story. You should also be aware that if you can persuade the lead narrator that your redirection is good for the story, you won't have to assign any value to it all.

Do we have to light candles?

No, you don't have to light candles. But you will need to have some way of keeping track of who has radiance.

Can we have more than one candle each to symbolise our radiance?

I think one candles for each narrator works best because it mean that narrators tend to consider whether using their radiance is worth it or not.

Three redirections seems too much/not enough, can I change the amount of redirections per activity?

There's nothing stopping you from changing the amount of redirections. Just make sure that the other narrator's are happy with this change in the rules.

How can a list of activities make a story?

A list of activities on their own are not sufficient for creating stories. It is the way those activities relate to one another and the meanings we bestow on them which brings out a story. That's why its so important to talk between activities about the story.

How long should it take to narrate an activity?

It all depends on how detailed your narration is and how involved the attending narrators are with adding suggestions and redirections. There's no rule that will tell you how long you should narrate an activity. I can advise you that the longer you narrate, the more important

Radiance

it is to pay attention to the attending narrators. Try to empathise with them. Get them involved in your narration by asking them to act out the parts of certain characters, ask them for advice, pay attention to their responses. Do what you can to make your narration interesting for the attending narrators and yourself.

What should our stories be about?

Anything at all. If you're stuck for an idea just use a setting from a favourite film or novel, change a few details, and start from there.

Radiance

Endnote

Both the PDF and paperback version of *Radiance* are released under Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 2.0. Which basically means you are free to make copies and distribute *Radiance* so long as I am attributed, you make no changes to it, and you're not doing it for commercial purposes.

In addition to being released under the Creative Commons *etcet-era*, the PDF version is free and the paperback version costs are solely for production and shipping (all of which goes to Lulu.com). If you've enjoyed *Radiance* and feel like donating a small sum of money to me, please go to:

<http://www.myspace.com/radiant.narration>

Alternatively, you can post a play report on gaming forum, write a review for your blog. You can also send a message to me at radiant.narration@googlemail.com or <http://twitter.com/RadiantGame>.

And if you don't enjoy *Radiance*, please feel free to tell people about this too: write a review for your blog, post a play report on a gaming forum, or send me a message.

- M. J. Graham, 2009

Radiance

Radiance

Index

Activity, **10 – 12**, 12 – 13, 13 – 14, 14 – 15, 16, 17, 18, 19.

Aspect, **12 – 13**, 13.

Attending Narrator, **11**, 12, 13 – 14, 14 – 15, 18, 19 – 20.

Candle, **9**, 10, 15 – 16, 19.

 World Candle, **10**, 15.

Character, **11**, 16, 17, 18, 20.

Conclusion, 16.

Element, **9 – 10**, 11, 12 – 13, 13, 17.

Ending, **11**, 13, 14.

Lead Narrator, **10 – 11**, 12, 14, 14 – 15, 16, 18, 19.

Narrator, **9**, 9 – 10, 10, 12, 15, 15 – 16, 16, 18, 19.

 Attending Narrator, **11**, 12, 13 – 14, 14 – 15, 18, 19 – 20.

 Lead Narrator, **10 – 11**, 12, 14, 14 – 15, 16, 18, 19.

Radiance, 9, **15 – 16**, 19.

Redirection, 11, **13 – 14**, 14 – 15, 18, 19.

Session, **9**, 15, 16.

Sortition, 14.

World, 9, **9 – 10**, 10, 17.

World Candle, **10**, 15.

Radiance

Coming later in 2009...

