

"When you have to kill a man,
it costs nothing to be polite."

-Winston Churchill

*Wish you
were here*

Death Takes A Holiday

A Narrative Entertainment
by Nick Wedig



Death Takes A Holiday

A light-hearted narrative fantasy
Concerning the grimmest of topics
For two or more participants

By Nicholas Wedig
Teapot Dome Games, Ltd.



The firm of **Boxmuller and Sons** had never been accurately named. Hopewell Boxmuller¹ had no sons. He simply liked the sound of the name for his store. Thus it was that, when the old eccentric died, the property passed into the joint custody of a variety of greatnieces, second cousins and his half-sister's step-children.

Such displays of inheritance law are by no means unusual. What was noteworthy were the experiences of these relatives as they voyaged to inspect their newfound estates on **Perdido Island**. Having chosen to eschew waiting for the daily ferry from the mainland, the family chose to rent a small sailboat from a local fisherman. This, too, is not the unusual part of the story. Nor is the fact that Perdido Island was seeing extremely low tides that day, due to a solar eclipse a quarter of the way around the planet.

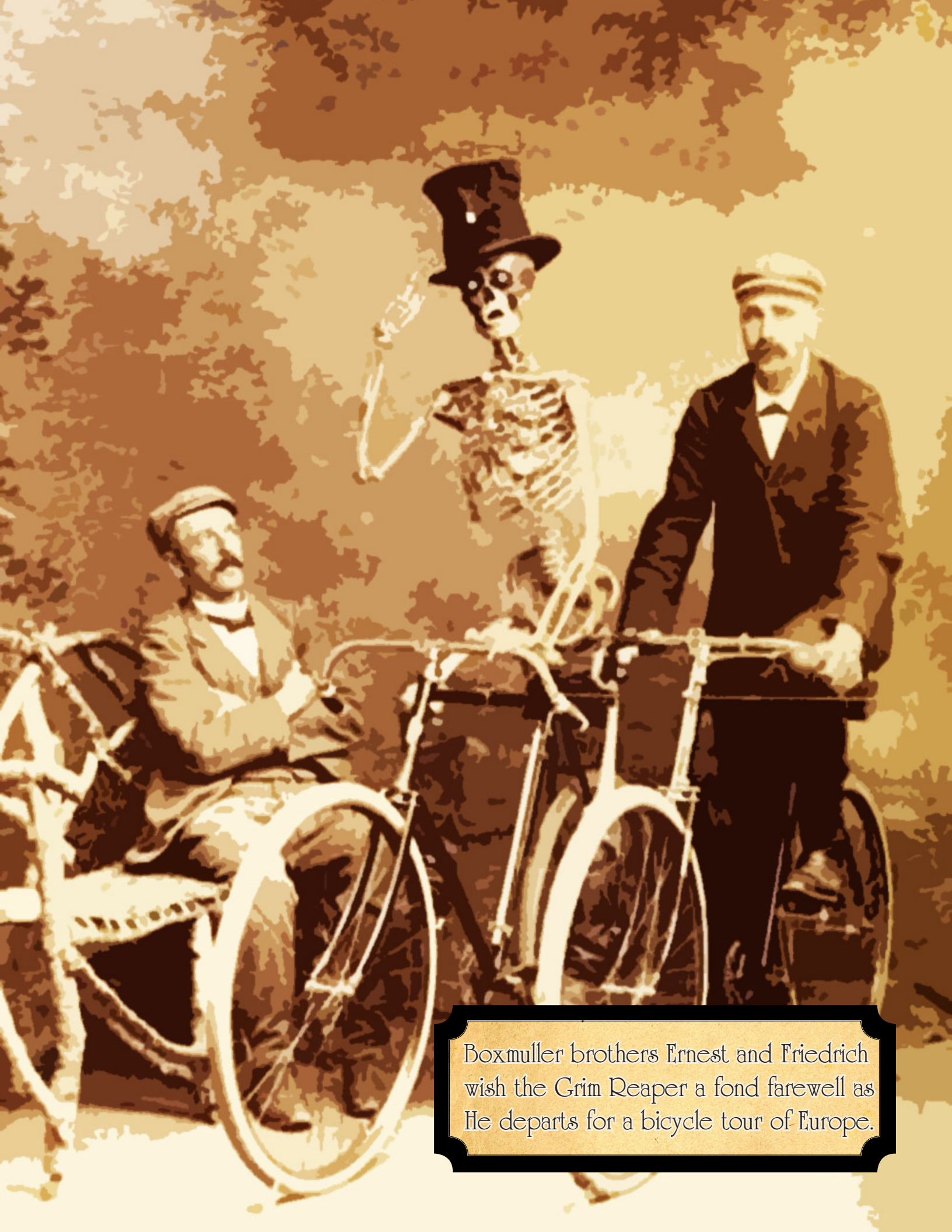
The first truly unusual part of the story came when the sailboat, captained and crewed by a family of amateurs, ran its hull up against the newly exposed mast of the long sunken *HMS Galatea*. The sunken schooner's mast pierced the hull of the rented vessel, and the boat sank, creating a collision of two boats in one location that would puzzle future archaeologists in later times.

There were no survivors.

And yet, the deaths of the Boxmuller relatives is not the end of the story. The premature demise of each unskilled mariner is just the beginning of an even stranger tale...



*"On a large enough time line, the survival
rate for everyone drops to zero."
-Chuck Palahniuk*



Boxmuller brothers Ernest and Friedrich
wish the Grim Reaper a fond farewell as
He departs for a bicycle tour of Europe.



Upon their demise, the Boxmuller family found themselves in the Bone Orchard, as most souls do once their earthly existence has been terminated. The Bone Orchard is the abode of the anthropomorphic personification of Death. Once He has collected a soul from its dying body, the Grim Reaper (*as He is colloquially called*) guides the lost soul into the Bone Orchard, and there to the Veil of Souls.

As with their recent nautical mishap, the Boxmullers' experiences within the Bone Orchard were atypical. As He led them toward the black swirling miasma of the Veil of Souls, the Grim Reaper paused for a moment. With a hesitation that implied uncertainty, the embodiment of mortality made a proposition to the Boxmuller relatives. Death had a peculiar offer for them.

The End of All Things, you see, had diligently been working without respite the past several millenia. He was becoming weary of His traditional task. He wanted to take a break from ending the lives of mortals. The Grim Reaper wished to relax and, for just a short time, stop Reaping souls.

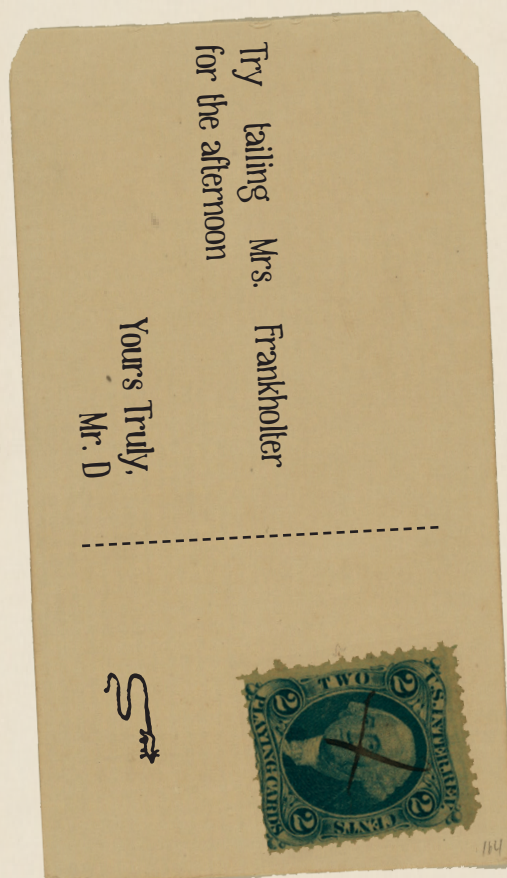
In short, Death needed a holiday.

And so it was that He made an offer to the mortal family whose souls He was shepherding. The Grim Reaper would return the family to their mortal lives and let them live. In exchange, the Boxmullers would act as substitute Reapers while Death was on holiday. They would go to the dying, stand by their side and touch their flesh in the moments just before death. Then the soul would follow the ersatz Reaper back to the Veil of Souls and thence on to whatever afterlife awaits. The Boxmullers would be the substitute Deaths of Perdido Island.

Perhaps dumbstruck by the metaphysical weight of their experiences, none of the Boxmuller clan asked how long the Reaper's holiday would last. This was the first of their many mistakes.

The next thing that they new, the Boxmuller family found themselves washing up on the beach of Perdido Island. Their boat had crashed but, miraculously, each and every one had all survived. A postcard sat on a nearby barrel, bearing a peculiar legend: **"Try tailing Mrs. Frankholter for the afternoon. Yours, Mr. D."**

This postcard would prove to be the first of many from the Grim Reaper to the family. Each subsequent card would be more cryptic than the last. But each card would also lead to a person who was dying, though sometimes by a circuitous or coincidental path.



Welcome, narrators!



Death Takes A Holiday is a collaborative story-telling entertainment. It is intended to be played by a small coterie of friends and acquaintances, perhaps two to five in number. You will each portray a unique Primary Character (*PC*) and collectively you will collaborate on portraying the minor characters (*NPCs*) and establishing the setting and other details.

You have control over your Primary Character's thoughts, feelings, and intentions. But the moment your character attempts to have a meaningful impact on the world or when you try to state something about the external world, then you are making a **statement**. Other participants in the game will be given the opportunity to modify or change your statement in certain specific ways. The other people at the table will be able to change what you said by applying a **response** to the statement. The responses are formalized reaction designed to add additional fictional detail and introduce plot complications. There is a limited pool of responses to pick from. Once a specific response is used, it cannot be reused until the pool empties and refreshes. Once each response has been used once, the pool refreshes and all then each response can be used once more.

Each important NPC, object, location or plotline will get its own **Story**, which is a list of important information about the fictional element, along with what responses have been used to modify it. A Story records what you need to know about that element, and identifies its relative importance to the game at large. The more details added (and the more input and feedback other players provide), the more important that character, object, or location is.

I always said that firearms
and ferris wheels dont mix.

-The Farewell to the Flesh



Customizing the setting

Before you begin play, everyone as a group will need to customize the setting of **Perdido Island**. You will do this as a collective, by taking the basic framework provided and modifying it to make it unique. On the next page, you'll find a list of statements about Perdido Island, and about the store **Boxmuller and Sons** and about the **Bone Orchard**, otherworldly abode of Death. Everyone should read over them and discuss as a group what they like and what they don't like from the list. Then you will select each response and apply it to one statement. Each Response changes, modifies or adds detail to an existing statement. Just use each response once to modify a statement, and make sure each statement and response get used once.

"Yes, and..." means that the you add an intensifying detail to the statement.

"Yes, but..." means you accept the statement as true, except for some exception or contradictory detail.

"No, but" means the statement is untrue, though a minor similar detail might be true.

"No, and..." Means the statement is untrue, and then you go beyond simple negation and describe the island as reflecting the opposite.

"Try it a different way" in this instance gives you the ability to rephrase, rename or change an element while keeping the statement more or less accurate in general theme, even if the specific details are changed.

"That's a funny story, actually..." means that this element will be developed through play into a longer, more detailed story of its own.

(Don't use "But only if..." for modifying the Island or Boxmuller and Sons. I'm not sure what it would mean in this situation.)

The realm I look upon and die
Another man will own
He shall attain the Heaven that I
Perish and have not known.
—A. E. Housman,
"When Israel Out of Egypt Came"

Be at the corner of Fifth
and Wolverstone at half-past
four. Though the weather will
be sunny, make sure you bring
your umbrella.



—The Oncoming Storm



Perdido Island

- ☐ "Yes, and..."
- ☐ "Yes, but..."
- ☐ "No, but..."
- ☐ "No, and..."
- ☐ "That's a funny story actually..."
- ☐ "Try it a different way"

✚ Has a population of approximately 40,000 (*which means an average of one death per day*). About half the population lives in the town of **Fable's Demise**

✚ Is known as a popular vacation place for people from the mainland

✚ Has an incompetent police force, specifically **Sheriff Horatio Flacks**² and **Deputy Irving P. Zalewsky**³, but it has a canny coroner named **Dr. Isabel Stavros**⁴

✚ Is home to a variety of strange spirits and supernatural beings usually not seen by humans, including various minor gods, forest sprites and household spirits.

✚ Is fundamentally a modern day American city in terms of social norms, technology and legalities, though it is anachronistic in aesthetics and style.

✚ Sunny climate, mostly forests

Boxmuller and Sons:

- ☐ "Yes, and..."
- ☐ "Yes, but..."
- ☐ "No, but..."
- ☐ "No, and..."
- ☐ "That's a funny story actually..."
- ☐ "Try it a different way"

✚ Had Hopewell Boxmuller's apartments on the second floor

✚ Sells some kind of quirky, anachronistic good (*figure out as a group what it is –perhaps old sideshow props, like paper-mache mummies and Fiji Mermaids?*).

✚ Mainly caters to tourists

✚ Is perpetually in debt

✚ Has no employees beyond the Boxmuller family

✚ Has strange things in the attic

The Bone Orchard:

- ☐ "Yes, and..."
- ☐ "Yes, but..."
- ☐ "No, but..."
- ☐ "No, and..."
- ☐ "That's a funny story actually..."
- ☐ "Try it a different way"

✚ Is accessible by entering a grave marked "**Fisher**" that can be found in the third row of every graveyard

✚ Is made of bones and skeletons

✚ Is a dark and somber place where no light shines brightly and regret overwhelms other emotions

✚ Holds the Veil of Souls, gateway to the Afterlife

✚ Has many areas that Death forbid anyone enter while He is away, and these spaces contain mysteries

✚ Can occasionally be accessed by still-living mortals who discover the appropriate rituals


2 *Misfire*
3 *Slippery Rock*
4 *Nephrosis*

Example:

Alice and Bob decide to play *Death Takes a Holiday* together. They begin play by modifying the setting of Perdido Island to their own taste. Alice likes the idea that the island is inhabited by forest spirits and forgotten gods. So she selects “Yes, but...” to respond to the statement, adding a detail “Yes, but the spirits don’t like dealing with humans because they don’t understand human psychology or society.” Bob wants the Boxmullers to be busier hunting after the deceased, so he applies “No, but...” to the statement about Perdido Island’s population creating one death per day. “No,” he writes, “the island has about 80,000 people for multiple deaths each day, though about 20,000 people live in Fable’s Demise.” The two players look at what else they can modify. They both think that a vacation spot is a good idea, since it means that the island will be visited by people from far away, here to have an adventure. But they don’t want the island to be a traditional beaches and nightclubs vacation spot. The two decide that the island is a vacation spot for eco-tourists, perhaps off the coast of Alaska. This is basically the same in outcome as the initial statement, but different in style, so they check off “Try it a different way”. They also need to modify the climate statement to fit, so Alice checks off “No, and” while Bob writes “The island is covered in ice year-round, and doesn’t see the sun for three months at a time.”

To wrap up the island, Alice and Bob have two statements left: “The island has two incompetent police but a competent coroner” and “The island is modern in technology and society but anachronistically retro in appearance and aesthetics.” The players also have two Responses remaining: “Yes, and...” and “That’s a funny story...” The obvious way to proceed would be to amplify the sociological statement with “Yes, and...” while making the relationship with the local authorities into a complicated story via “That’s a funny story”. But Alice and Bob don’t want the obvious way out. They reverse the priorities, so that they will augment the statement about the local officials. “Yes, and” they write, “the incompetent local police mean that the Island is a haven for smugglers of numerous kinds.” Meanwhile, they will explore in play how society is modern but the aesthetics of the island are anachronistically art deco. They make a new Story discussing this clash of expectations, which will develop in play. Perhaps they will discover the secret cause of this discrepancy. Is Perdido Island home to a temporal anomaly? A secret coven of the undead? A merging of two distinct timelines? Or do they just not get fashion magazines up here? Do the locals dress up that way for benefit of the tourists? Only in-game exploration will tell for sure.

Once Perdido Island is sorted out, Alice and Bob turn to the store of Boxmuller and Sons. They proceed in a similar manner, adding and modifying details to the store and the mysterious Bone Orchard, making their version of the game’s setting unique and fitting to their tastes.



Your Boxmuller



When you begin playing *Death Takes A Holiday*, you will need to create a Primary Character. Your initial Primary Character will be one of the Boxmuller family, who has made a bargain to be a substitute Reaper in exchange for prolonged survival. As the game progresses, other characters will become available for use as Primary Characters. But for an initial fictional “seed”, you will create one of the Boxmullers.

To create a Boxmuller, you will take the list of Boxmuller traits and modify it. Though every Boxmuller shares some similarities with their kin, each is a unique individual. Thus, you will accept some Statements, negate some and modify others.

Your Boxmuller sheet has a checklist of each Response: “Yes, and...”, “Yes, but...”, “No, and...”, “No, but...”, “Try it a different way”, “But only if...” “Try it a different way” and “That’s an interesting story, actually...”. You will use each Response once to modify a Statement about your new Boxmuller. Since there are more statements than Responses, some Statements will remain unmodified.

“Try it a different way” means here that you will reword the Statement to be more or less equivalent, even while the general sentiment of the Statement is accurate. “But only if...” invites another player to provide input on your Primary Character. You select a Statement to modify with “But only if...”, and they provide a condition for the statement. You can either accept the statement and their condition, or you can reject both. “That’s a funny story, actually...” means that this is a story that will be developed in play. Take a Story checklist, write an initial statement on it, and be prepared to address that issue further later in the game.



Your Boxmuller:

☞ Has few ties back to the mainland

☞ Cares about the Boxmuller to their left

☞ Has been granted the ability to see how someone will die,
just by looking at them

☞ Has been granted the ability to see spirits and ghosts

☞ Has fond childhood memories of the island

☞ Did something shameful in their past that they now wish to hide

☞ Has difficulty expressing their emotions

☐ "Yes, and..."

☐ "Yes, but..."

☐ "But only if..."

☐ "No, but..."

☐ "No, and..."

☐ "That's a funny story actually..."

☐ "Try it a different way"

Example:

Alice looks over the list, and decides that she doesn't like the "*Did something shameful*" statement. So she checks off the "No, but" box and writes "*No, she is terribly proud of what she did, though it is a secret she has to keep.*" Alice doesn't know what her character did, just yet, but she'll figure it out sooner or later. Alice and Bob discuss for a moment and decide that they should have the two supernatural powers on the list between the two of them. But they decide not to spend all their "Yes" statements on the Reaper's gifts. So each chooses one power to take and one to abandon. Alice prefers seeing spirits to knowing when someone will die. So she writes under the spirit sight "*Yes, and sometimes my Boxmuller traps the spirits in little jars.*" For the Cause of Death sight Alice notes, "*No, and my Boxmuller often will accidentally target the wrong person for Reaping, right until the real impending death becomes blatantly obvious.*" Alice begins to notice that she really needs a name for her character. While she struggles to create appropriate nomenclature, Alice looks over the remaining statements and responses. She sees the "*has few ties to the mainland*" entry, and decides that that could tie into her mysterious secret past. Alice notes "**That's a funny story**" underneath. There's some reason that her Boxmuller cannot return to the mainland. She's running from her past for some reason, though Alice is willing to let that be determined at a later date. Alice and Bob discuss the "*cares deeply*" statement, and decide that a lopsided, uneasy relationship would be more interesting than a more balanced one. Alice write "*Yes, but only because he's the only person Yvette has at the moment.*" Alice's character is running from her past, so she turns to her cousin – Bob's PC, weird cousin Zebulon – for help. Zebbie, meanwhile, has no idea of the wreck Yvette made of her life, so his understanding of their relationship is completely different. Alice is also pleasantly surprised to note a name appearing in her notes, so she writes "**Yvette Boxmuller**" at the top of her sheet. Now Alice is getting to the last couple statements: "*fond childhood memories*" and "*difficulty expressing emotions*". And she has two responses remaining: "**Try it a different way**" and "**But only if**". Alice decides that "*Difficulty expressing emotions*" doesn't sound right, but rather writes "*Yvette is tremendously expressive, but she's tremendously conflicted inside and when she tries to show her feelings, everyone is confused by the tempest of emotions.*" That sounds more like the sort of character Alice enjoys playing. That leaves "*Happy childhood memories*" for Bob's input. Bob suggests "*You have happy memories of Perdido Island, but only if those memories are another clue to why she is trying to hide out on the Island.*" Alice notes that this means that Bob has become interested in her character concept, and she happily accepts the input he suggests.

Now Alice has enough of a character concept and background for her character that they can begin play.

Being a Substitute Reaper



Death has set up a simple system for handling His absence. Every day or so, the Grim Reaper would send the Boxmullers a postcard. Each postcard would be emblazoned with a cryptic clue as to who was about to die. If the Boxmullers follow the clues provided, they eventually arrive at a person who was about to die. The route to the dying person, though, is usually a twisty series of improbable coincidences and unlikely occurrences. Anyone mentioned on the postcard is only rarely the target of the Reaping. More often, finding the person mentioned on the postcard leads the Boxmuller into a deeper adventure, eventually finding the doomed individual.

These cards arrive via mysterious means to wherever the Boxmullers happen to be, not via the mundane postal system.

Similarly, it is rarely clear from the postcard who is going to die. So you can always have a different NPC arrive on the scene with a more clear cause of death, if you have otherwise narrated yourselves into a corner.

To aid in their work, Death granted the Boxmullers some magical abilities. One is the ability to identify how an individual will die merely by looking at them. The ability only conveys a single, brief detail of a specific word or phrase. Often the cause of death will be indirect or non-obvious: a cause of death like "*Holes*" might refer to a sinkhole in the ground that they fall into, or it might refer to the strain of digging a hole causing a stroke. Or it might be a bullet hole, as a gunshot wound causes the death. Or it could be a misaligned hole in a piece of machinery causing a one-ton iron wheel to go rolling off course and over our hapless subject. The causes of death are ambiguous enough so that you the players can surprise each other with how they apply, and also so that you can apply creativity to make sure the cause is applicable to the situation at hand.

Any Boxmuller examined to determine their cause of death will be listed as having "*Boating Accident*" for their cause of death.

The Act of Reaping

Removing the souls from a soon-to-be deceased is a simple affair. The Reaper simply needs to approach the subject and briefly touch them some time in the last few minutes of life. All the about-to-die notices is a slight chill run down their spine, as their immortal spirit separates from their mortal form. Once released from the body, the soul is free to follow after the Reaper back to the Bone Orchard.

Subsequent to their death, the deceased haunt the Reaper as a ghost, following them everywhere, until they are brought to Veil

of Souls. Once they enter the swirling maelstrom of psychic energies, the spirit passes on to whatever afterlife awaits them.

When asked about the existence of Heaven or Hell or God or the like, Death was evasive. Revealing cosmic secrets is not his department, you see.

Canny readers may begin to wonder about the parameters of this exercise. "What happens if the Reaper chooses not to Reap?" they ask, along with a variety of other questions. Assuming the death occurs as preordained, then the individual dies but their animating life force remains inside the body. These unfortunate individuals remain dead but active, as one of the un-dead. Un-dead beings come back in a variety of forms, from shambling reanimated corpses to intangible ghostlike creatures to stranger things still. Similarly, the pain of their death tends to warp the personalities of the deceased. When a character dies without a proper Reaping, you as players should apply these statements to them, and modify each one with a response from the checklist:

- ☐ "Yes, and..."
- ☐ "Yes, but..."
- ☐ "But only if..."
- ☐ "No, but..."
- ☐ "No, and..."
- ☐ "That's a funny story actually..."
- ☐ "Try it a different way"

- ☞ **Is a rotting physical corpse, though he/she can still move act as a living person can**
- ☞ **Has unnatural, inhuman hungers**
- ☞ **Has an inhuman ability to withstand pain and damage**
- ☞ **Remembers their life prior to their death**
- ☞ **All the hatred, envy, depression and other negative emotions of their old life are amplified**
- ☞ **All the joy and love and positive emotions of their life are warped in unhealthy ways**
- ☞ **Hates the living**

These options are not here to shut down potential stories about Reapers trying to spare lives or mess with the system. They're actually here to give you a starting point to make up stories about how your Boxmullers mess up their Reaper job or manipulate death and souls and such. Trying to save lives will produce interesting stories, as will shirking of Reaperly duties.

The other way for a Reaper to interfere with the natural order is to prevent the death itself. By correctly deciphering Death's postcard ahead of time, a clever Reaper might be able to identify who is about to die and prevent that death. This may seem like an act of mercy, but it isn't. If a soul survives beyond the time of its preordained death, then another must die in their place, shortly thereafter. Even worse, you have performed no mercy to the person you saved. The soul can only survive for so long on this mortal plane of existence. Any soul left in contact with the earth for too long withers, until it is barely there at all. To outside observers, the person seems fine, but any ability to feel joy or love dwindles away until they become a cruel, spiteful and destructive individual. They will never again know happiness, and they will only bring pain and suffering to those around them.

The only way to free such a soul is to repeat the circumstances of their death. Recreating the cause of death intended to do the subject in will kill the living body and release the corrupted soul.

Causes of Death

Unsteady ladder
Misquotation
Rounding error
Leopard
Undiagnosed congenital disease
Karaoke
Piso mojado
Malpractice
Elevator repair man
Texting while driving
#3 socket wrench
Holes
Tapdancing
Late for work
Falling
Facebook event invitation
Chemotherapy
Martyr complex
Suicide
Suicide, but not their own
Tree falling in the forest
Ceiling collapse
Misfire
Mischief
Prank
Distracted
F

Clerical error
Bus running late
Technical error
Staring at the stars
Curious puppy
Training exercise
Visiting head of state
Basement flooding
Gas leak
Unsteady ladder
Escaped zoo animal
Bathtub gin
Not seaweed
Improper preparation
Ominous prophecy
Poor maintenance
Unlisted ingredients
Gerrymandering
Food poisoning
Surprise
Bacon
Infidelity
Lost in thought
Folk music
Frogs
Mistating the estate tax
Cuts
No coffee
\$2 off
Building ring
Time
ence
g strikes twice
cuts
Faulty firehose
Too much fatty food
Brain aneurysm
Steroid abuse
Shouldn't have eaten it all
Should have exercised
Prank gone wrong
Cold blooded score settling

Excessive guilt
Botched assassination
Alcohol
Racing
Drugs
Horses
Poison
Aircraft
Duel
D
M
Take the 10:15 train, and check aisle 3, seat C.
-The Tunnel at the End of the Light
T
Mon
Scaphism
Insect torture
Thrown roof tile
Drunken mule
Wooden leg
Late seafood
Faulty parachute
Fungicide
Carelessly tossed match
Homeopathic medicine
Surfboard
Paranoia
Explosive decompression
25 pound box of quarters
Sudden braking
The Gideon Bible
Limnic eruption
Windstorm
Frustration
Improper headcount
Hypoxia
MRI too close to metal
Explosive hair bleach

Many comedians talk about dying onstage, but only a few actually do so.

-Your Worst Critic





(scene?)

At the start of each session, you pick a Primary Character from the list of potential Primary Characters. Your Primary Character is one that you control exclusively. You get to narrate their thoughts and feelings unimpeded, and you are responsible for roleplaying out their actions and advocating for their goals. The other players will have their own PCs, who you cannot directly control with your narration. But for any other characters, anyone can narrate their actions, and any such narration can be modified using the response system.

You can't take control of someone else's PC with narration or with a response. If Bob says that his PC Zebulon is scared or proud or hungry, then that is the case, as it is Bob's privilege as Zebulon's player. But once Zebulon starts trying to affect the outside world, you can use a response to modify how Zebulon's actions affect other people or things.

After playing for a bit, your pool of potential PCs will grow larger than the number of players, meaning there will be some excess, unplayed potential PCs. Some groups might want to maintain tight control over their Primary Characters when they're not playing them. In such groups, each Primary Character belongs to their primary creator, even when that player is not currently playing them. So if I gave the most input on Deputy Zalewsky, then he would be mine to control as needed, and other players wouldn't be able to use him as a PC. Other groups might have less player ownership of characters. In this case, once a character is a potential PC, anyone can pick that character as their PC for a story, perhaps asking my permission first. This is one of many places where you should try to fit

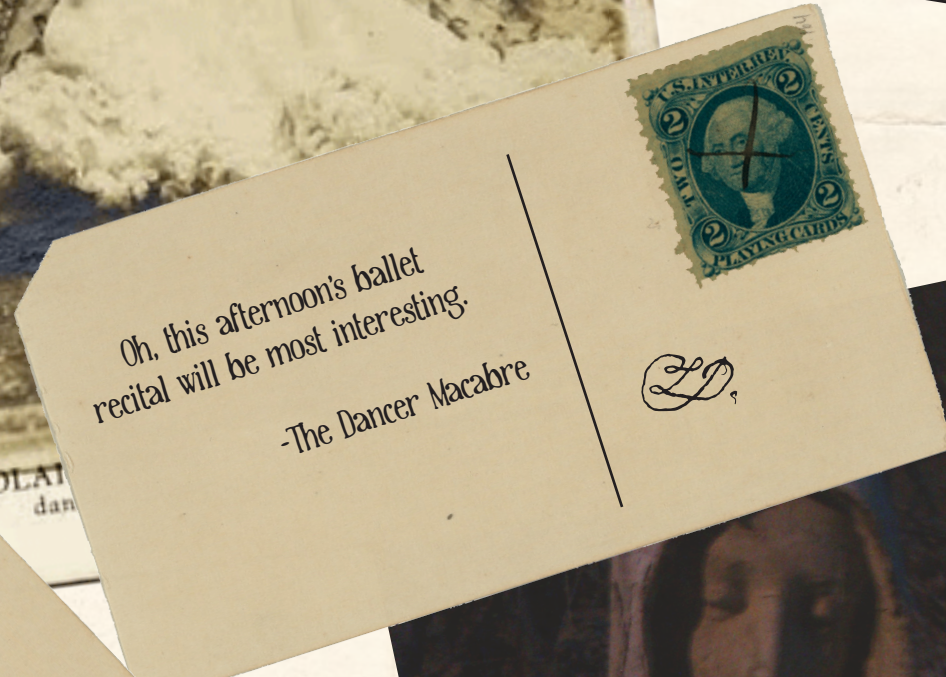
Anything can be a Primary Character, if you play it right. Though you initially start with the Boxmullers as potential PCs, others become available as choices as you play. Anything that has completed one story checklist, has a motive to act and a way of affecting the world can be your PC for a scene or for a storyline.

Astute readers may not that this makes Perdido Island itself into a potential PC, as well as the Bone Orchard or other locations. This also can make other fictional constructs into potential PCs. Even past storylines might be PCs in the right sort of game, as when a character's past deeds come back to haunt them. These are advanced, experimental techniques that I want to test out after we have basic gameplay sorted out.


Just like the song says,
Father McKenzie is writing the
words to a sermon that no one
will hear. Isn't that cute?

-Not Religious, Myself





The sequence of play:

 Most of the game will take the form of free narration. You describe what your Primary Character will do, your fellow performers will describe for their PCs. And occasionally, one player will need to narrate something beyond the bounds of that player's PC. Perhaps facts about the setting need established, or NPCs established or portrayed. Perhaps some other player attempts something, like climbing a wall or piloting an aeroplane or convincing the local magistrate to free your imprisoned cousin. When you declare new facts like this about the world, the game calls it a statement.

Most statements you make about the game world will go uncommented. You will make a minor declaration about how your PC does something mundane —drinking a cup of tea, perchance. If the other players nod amicably or say “*Yeah, okay*” or don't say anything at all, then what you said becomes a true part of the fiction. That is to say, your character has succeeded in sipping the tea. *Bravo.*

But what if another player were to lodge an objection to the consumption of the *camellia sinensis*'s sweet nectar? Perhaps your doughty compatriot thinks the tea might be poisoned, or the teapot empty, or they wish to have their Primary Character slap the teacup from your hand. Each of these events is a narrative turn away from your proposed course of action and along some new direction. Or perhaps the player wishes to augment the described action: “*Yes, you drink the tea, and it is delicious*”, or “*Yes, and you drink an entire ocean's worth of tea.*”

Who knew
tintin's
so large?

Lady
teapot

Cot-
was

On most occasions, the other players won't trouble you over minor or mundane details. Drinking tea or crossing the street or shutting a door should usually be let past with simple acceptance. But it is important that you as a player remember that you have the power to modify even the smallest of details, should the occasion arise. This system does not differentiate between the stomping of a gnat or the slaying of an army of commando angels armed with howitzers.

When a player makes a statement about the world around them, any other player has the option to let it pass into truth. Each player can simply accept what was said with simple nods or by saying “yes” or by saying nothing at all. If they wish to make any

Italians have a saying:
"When the game is over, the king
and the pawn go in the same box."
-a Chess Grandmaster

meaningful change to the statement, then they can choose to modify this Statement's nature by picking a Response. There are seven Responses, which should already be getting familiar to the reader:

- ✎ Yes, and...
- ✎ Yes, but...
- ✎ No, but...
- ✎ No, and...
- ✎ But only if...
- ✎ That's a funny story actually...
- ✎ Try it a different way.

Each Response is helpfully printed on a marker or card or some kind of "chit"⁵. Initially, all responses are placed in a pool so as to be available for use. Locate the pool of chits together in a group, where any of your merry band of players can and may reach them, manipulate them, coddle them and (perhaps) love them, if only for a moment.

When player uses a response, that response is expended and cannot be used again until the pool is refreshed. Take that response's chit and place it in a separate area, perhaps dubbed "the discard area" or "The Pit of Shame". Since these exiled responses are unusable, your options to respond dwindle as the narrative progresses.

Note that "Try it a different way", "But only if.." and "That's a funny story actually..." have special rules for their actions. They're covered in the next section, along with some advice on how to use the different responses. At this point, just be aware that "Try it a different way" is never expended or sent to the discard pile.

The pool of responses diminishes over time, until eventually only "Try it a different way" remains. When "Try it a different way" is the sole occupant of the pool, then you can refresh the pool. Finish resolving whatever happens because of the last statement and its response. Then, before the narrative moves on and more statements are made, you should move all the responses back from the Pit of Shame and back into the pool. Their penitentiary exile has been served, and they may be employed once more to modify future statements.

⁵ Thus named in honor of Admiral Algernon Q. Chit, who died so bravely in the Great Nomenclature Riots of 1894. Long may he be remembered, and those men and women who died in service of containment hierarchy taxonomies.

Example:

Now that they have their characters and setting sorted out, Alice and Bob are ready to begin actual play. Alice decides to begin with the scene just after their literal brush with Death. The Boxmullers stand up and dust the sand from their clothing. Alice's Primary Character, Yvette notices the strange postcard waiting nearby. "*Try tailing Mrs. Frankholter for the afternoon*" it read. Yvette looked over at her cousin Zebulon and shrugged. "I guess our job begins now" she sighed. Zebulon nodded in agreement.

Here Alice pauses to consider how the Boxmullers would proceed to try to find this Mrs. Frankholter. Alice describes how Yvette begins to stride away purposefully, seeking a telephone directory. Bob interjects at this point, saying "*Yes, but the bystanders at the beach are astonished to see a survivor of a deadly boat crash immediately stride away from the scene without concern for her own safety.*" Bob moves the "**Yes, but**" marker into the discard pile. Alice is a little surprised at this (she had not imagined any witnesses to the crash). She could use "**Try it a different way**" to make Bob rephrase the objection, but she decides to go along with it. So Alice asks if Bob wants to have a scene in which Zebulon explains the crash to the authorities. "Will that be a good scene, with something interesting happening?" Bob asks. Alice points out that this would be a good time to introduce the local police force as an important NPC group. Bob sees the wisdom in this. They decide to let Yvette leave the scene of the crash for the moment while Zebulon tries to sort out the story of what happened.

Alice takes on the persona of Sheriff Flacks, who enters the scene boisterously calling out for the witnesses to stand back. "Anybody injuriate themselves in this here maritime-type misadventure?" he demands of a nearby witness. Alice states that a witness points over to Zebulon as the one from the crash. "*Yes, and*" Bob responds "*the bystander also notes that a woman ran off from wreckage after looking at the postcard.*" (Bob moves the **Yes And** counter to the discard.

Zebulon immediately starts trying to concoct a story for the Sheriff. But the loudmouth lawman wasn't interesting in excuses. "I think the sheriff is immediately interested in hunting down Yvette for fleeing from the scene of an accident," Bob says. "*No, but*" Alice answers "*the Sheriff finds the postcard in the sand and thinks that the strange woman must be the Mrs. Frankholter mentioned on it.*" The Sheriff hurried off to catch the enigmatic Mrs. Frankholter, leaving his even more incompetent Deputy Zalewsky to question Zebulon.

Play continues on in a similar manner from there, with the two creating new statements and modifying their misadventures.

The Responses

Much of *Death Takes A Holiday* consists of modifying other people's statements via responses. For this reason, it is advisable to consider each potential response in some detail. The first four responses are relatively straightforward. The last three, however, have some special rules for how they apply.

Yes and...

This response takes a statement and amplifies it. Using this response, you can add additional detail to a statement or increase the scope of a statement. Use it to expand the effect of a statement in directions other players might not have considered. It is important to not make the 'and' clause negate or lessen the primary thrust of the statement. This is easy to do grammatically, but it is really the province of the "Yes, but..." statement.

Yes, but...

Now, this response generally agrees with the statement, but it negates or lessens the primary statement. Try not to make the 'but' clause override the initial statement. That is what a "No, but..." response is for. Make sure that the majority of the statement is true, albeit with some exception or drawback.

No and

This is the only time that you have the outright authority to completely negate another player's input. Every other response preserves at least a sliver of the original intention in some way. "No, and..." does not. It completely shuts out the proposed input, and then goes a step beyond to assert the opposite. So use this response carefully and judiciously.

No but

This negates the initial statement, but not entirely. Some portion of the goal is achieved, or some piece of the idea is true. Try to make sure you don't completely negate the statement, while also making sure you don't completely agree without negating any.

"And: That's an additive, like 'this and that'."

"But: That's sort of the opposite, 'Not this but that'."

*"Conjunction Junction",
Bob Dorough*

Follow the red dog down
alley. It knows where it is
going.

-The Ultimate Destination



But only if

When you use “**But only if...**”, you aren’t creating a definitive statement in the same way as with the other responses. You’re proposing a way things could go, for the original speaker to confirm or deny. You are adding a condition onto their statement. At that point, they can choose to accept your condition, making both parts true. Or they can reject your condition and abandon their statement altogether. Either your inclusion rides in with their statement, or that statement never happened and they need to narrate along entirely new lines.

That’s a funny story, actually


This response suggests that the statement is more complex than it seems at first, or that it leads to unforeseen consequences. For example, if the statement was about a player character attempting someone, then using “**That’s a funny story, actually...**” might mean that their goal requires further effort and detail before it is completed. Alternatively, you might use the same phrase to mean that the action was successful, but that it sparks the start of a new storyline as a consequence of the act. Thus, if Yvette is trying to break into a wealthy landowner’s estates, “**That’s a funny story, actually...**” might mean the sneaking in is an interesting enough sequence that we should look into it in detail and describe her illicit entrance rather than simply cutting to her being inside. Or the same phrase might mean that she succeeds in entering the compound covertly, but that this endeavour leads to further consequences – perhaps a servant notices evidence of her passage after she is in the building, and begins seeking out the intruder. Regardless of how it happens, you start a new story sheet for the events.

Try it a different way

This response is slightly special. It doesn’t change or negate, exactly. It says to the narrator that there is something unappealing about their narration. It suggests that they might have a good idea, but the specific details aren’t quite right. It is always an option, so that you can always suggest, politely, that something strikes you as wrong about what was suggested. Perhaps you find that something said doesn’t fit your mental image of a location or character. Or the statements lead into narrative directions you would prefer not to follow. You should take a second to explain your qualms, then allow the narrator to craft a new, alternative statement that works in a different way.



Stories

 ny important fictional element in the game has a story. Each story will have its own story sheet, which is a place to record details and facts that people establish about the thing during gameplay. As you play, you will develop the stories of people, places, objects and actions. As an element becomes important to the game, you may want to start a story sheet for that person, location or storyline. If you visit St. Alban's Cathedral once, it will be helpful to have some record of what it is like so that the next time a PC visits the cathedral, it is similar and you can build on previous detail. Any time an important new fact is established, make some note of it. Your understanding of an important object will grow and change. You will discover hidden depths to characters. The “**That’s a funny story**” response means that each story will spawn new stories as well, so as you play the world will grow in depth and detail.

Your starting Boxmuller's sheet is a story sheet, as are the sheets of information for Perdido Island, Boxmuller and Sons or the Bone Orchard. Any postcard that Death sends the Boxmullers is itself a Story, as it will lead them on strange new adventures into unknown places.

On the story sheet, you have a checklist of responses. As each response is applied to a statement about that fictional element, check it off. When every response has been checked off, a major milestone has been reached for that fictional element. If it is a character, the character has become developed enough to be useable as a Primary Character.

If the checklist was for one of the Grim Reaper's postcards, then it is time to narrate how some character meets their death. One of the Boxmullers pursuing the death hinted at on the card will witness the death of another character (*barring anything unusual, like the Boxmuller saving the character*). Most of the time, this other character will be a minor NPC. But it could easily be a major NPC or even a PC under appropriate circumstances. The Boxmullers themselves have already been through their fated demise, so they are not going to die unless circumstances are unusual in some way.

Locations, objects and stories could also be used as PCs after their checklist is completed, but that's more complicated and weird.

The player of a PC is the only person who can narrate their PC's death

Growth and change:



After any time playing, you can choose one completed character, location or other fictional element and modify a piece of information on their story sheet. Use “Yes, and...” to make the fact more important, or use “Yes, but...” to change the meaning of a fact. “No” responses negate a previously true statement, which might be because you have changed your mind about something, or your character has grown or changed. Or maybe it shows a secret being revealed or a lie uncovered. “That’s a funny story...” will make that fact an important story on its own for next session. In general, you want to reach some sort of group consensus if the thing modified is still a minor character or if it isn’t owned by anyone specifically. If you’re changing a detail on the sheet of your own Primary Character or another fictional element that you have responsibility over, then go hog wild. Just let your other players know what you’re changing, and why.

That's why the text has those big margins, you realize.



At the end of a session, the group should discuss what they enjoyed and what they didn’t. Then they should choose one of the responses and apply it to *a rule of the game*. Go back through the rules here and write a note in the margin about how “Yes, it’s accurate, but...” or how it applies “only if...”. The group as a whole needs to reach a consensus on what rules gets changed and how it gets changed. But each session you should be hacking the system, modifying it in small ways or large ways, until it becomes a game better suited for your group in particular. I don’t know your group as well as you players do, so I hope that you make this game into the game that you enjoy playing.

- ☐ “Yes, and...”
- ☐ “Yes, but...”
- ☐ “But only if...”
- ☐ “No, but...”
- ☐ “No, and...”
- ☐ “That’s a funny story actually...”
- ☐ “Try it a different way”

Helena Mocknaughton has begun receiving love letters from her husband once more. Which would be sweet and touching, had he not died in 1997.

-The End of Romance.



"Professor" Baldwin's leap
from "The City of Quincy" is
gonna get somebody killed.

But it's not the "professor".

-The Final Flight



HE JUMPS FROM THE CLOUDS!

Prof. T. S. Baldwin, the World-Famed Aeronaut, in His Leap
From the Heights of Heaven, Shooting

TWO MILES THROUGH SPACE!

HE DROPS

LIKE

A

METEOR



WILL

HE

KILL

HIMSELF

Ascending in his mammoth Silk Balloon, "City of Quincy," and grasping
his frail gossamer with his hands, he will shoot to earth at the rate of
1,000 FEET A MINUTE! ★

Awe the World! He Lives Years in a Moment!

FROM THE

at 4:30 P. M.

Strange Threats

Perdido Island may prove to be an inhospitable new home to the Boxmuller family. Now that they are imbued with a magical power over death itself, other interested parties are likely to intervene. Many such groups may have benevolent intentions, as with doctors trying to save sick patients or grieving family members trying to preserve a dying aunt. Most heartbreaking of all are the parents trying to prevent their children from dying. Use these sort of moral dilemmas to create difficult decisions and moral quandaries for the standin Reapers.

Other entities, though, wish to oppose the Boxmullers for selfish or malevolent reasons. The shadowy **Tithonus Society**'s members wish to live forever so that they can gain complete control over society. **The forest spirits** enjoy playing with human lives, and manipulating their destinies. And the **Widow's Walk Shipping Company** is a front for a cabal of the undead, who desperately want to avoid whatever afterlife awaits them.

How to use the threats

There are two ways to use the threats contained herein. You can modify them up-front, or you can develop them in-play. If you know that you want to use a specific threat and make them an important part of the game, you can do all your modifications before you start playing the game. Discuss the threat with your fellow players, and apply each response to a statement, just as you did with Perdido Island and the Boxmuller and Sons store. This prepares the threat in question to be used as a Primary Character right away.

You could also introduce the threat in the middle of a game session. Then, instead of stopping to discuss each and every detail, you can instead check off responses to statements as those statements become relevant to your game. This will get you into regular play faster, but the threat will take longer to become usable as a Primary Character. The responses might not line up so that you can check off each response neatly in a row when each statement becomes relevant to the game.

It's picture day today at Grunderson Elementary School. I wonder whose photo will be taken by the county coroner instead of the school photographer?

-Memento Me



The Widow's Walk Shipping Company

- ☐ "Yes, and..."
- ☐ "Yes, but..."
- ☐ "But only if..."
- ☐ "No, but..."
- ☐ "No, and..."
- ☐ "That's a funny story actually..."
- ☐ "Try it a different way"

✂ Has warehouses and shipping boats and docks across Perdido Island

✂ Is run by two widowed twin sisters, Mrs. Eudora Comiter¹ and Mrs. Iphigenia Belvedere²

✂ But those husbands still live on as undead

✂ The two dead husbands are leaders of a secret tribe of undead that live in the company's warehouses

✂ The company only does enough legitimate shipping to act as a cover for its smuggling enterprises, which is itself a front for the unded coven

✂ Hides any undead seeking refuge from the mundane world

✂ Is seeking measures to prevent the souls being reaped from their undead members



I wouldn't get upset over what
is in the barrel at the Widows
Walk Shipping Company.

After all, getting upset didn't
help the widows any.

-The Cause of Grief

¹ Electrocutation
² Mayhem

The Tithonus Society

- ✎ Is a secret society, comparable to the Freemasons
- ✎ Has more wealth and resources than you would believe
- ✎ Is mainly composed of superrich trust-fund kids who want to live forever
- ✎ Is led by the immortal Tithonus, who was granted eternal life but not eternal youth and is now unbelievably old.
- ✎ Wants immortality so that they can control society and maintain control forever
- ✎ Make their base of operations on the island in a desanctified monastery
- ✎ Because of their strange experiments into immortality, they have developed a variety of odd superscience gadgets and black magic rituals

- ☐ "Yes, and..."
- ☐ "Yes, but..."
- ☐ "But only if..."
- ☐ "No, but..."
- ☐ "No, and..."
- ☐ "That's a funny story actually..."
- ☐ "Try it a different way"

Mrs. Rosenbaum has terminal lymphatic cancer. But that will not be today's cause of death.

-A Scorpio



"It is better to spend your time at funerals than at festivals. For you are going to die, and you should think about it while there is still time."

- Ecclesiastes 7:2



Forest Spirits

- ✦ Are strange and inhuman in form, personality and desires
- ✦ Do not understand the long term consequences of their actions
- ✦ Try to hide from human beings, so most people don't realize that they exist
- ✦ Want to increase the number of living beings in the world, by any means necessary.
- ✦ Are terrified of machines because they don't understand them
- ✦ Can place minor enchantments or curses on those who please or displease them
- ✦ Will make bargains or gamble for intangibles (*like emotions, destinies, souls, etc.*) with people who can find their secret hideaways in the forest

"I said 'Hey man, do you think you can help?' He said 'Of course I can - I'm an elf. We're not just fictional device. We sail ravines and give advice.'"
- "The Present Tense Turneen",
Moxey Frivious



Allison Jemeny is attempting to bargain her way out of her own impending demise. See that she meets her fate as per the proper schedule.

April
• • •
June

-A Bit of a Stickler
for Punctuality

- ☐ "Yes, and..."
- ☐ "Yes, but..."
- ☐ "But only if..."
- ☐ "No, but..."
- ☐ "No, and..."
- ☐ "That's a funny story actually..."
- ☐ "Try it a different way"

Warlocks and Necromancers

- ☐ "Yes, and..."
- ☐ "Yes, but..."
- ☐ "But only if..."
- ☐ "No, but..."
- ☐ "No, and..."
- ☐ "That's a funny story actually..."
- ☐ "Try it a different way"

*"Quaff while thou canst: another race,
When thou and thine, like me, are sped,
May rescue thee from Earth's embrace,
And rhyme and revel with dead."*

*- "Lines Inscribed upon a Cup
Formed from a Skull",
Lord Byron,*

- ☞ Have been seeking entrance to the Bone Orchard for centuries
- ☞ Can bind ghosts and spirits and force them into servitude
- ☞ Seek power for entirely selfish reasons
- ☞ Misuse and abuse their power over life and death
- ☞ Cannot raise people from the dead or create zombies, but can bind undead into their service
- ☞ Come from an exotic, far off land
- ☞ Are fond of elaborate speeches and shows of power beyond what is required to get the job done.



Lighthouse tours will soon
prove more dangerous than Mr.
Manciple had anticipated.

--Unexpected
yet Inevitable



Inspirations:

- ☐ "Yes, and..."
- ☐ "Yes, but..."
- ☐ "But only if..."
- ☐ "No, but..."
- ☐ "No, and..."
- ☐ "That's a funny story actually..."
- ☐ "Try it a different way"

Original game concept by Sam Zeitlin.
Many thanks to him for letting me use it.

- ☞ Discworld novels by Terry Pratchett, particularly those that focus on Death himself (*Mort*, *Reaper Man*, *Soul Music*, etc.) (*Novels*)
- ☞ *Machine of Death*, edited by Ryan North, Matthew Bennardo and David Malki (*Collection of short stories*)
- ☞ *Dead Like Me* and *Pushing Daisies*, created by Bryan Fuller. (*Television series*)
- ☞ *Time Bandits*, *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, and *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* dir. Terry Gilliam (*Movies*)
- ☞ The Professor Layton games by Level 5 Games (*Videogames*)
- ☞ *The Triplets of Bellville*, dir. Sylvain Chomet, *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain*, dir. Jean-Peuret Jeunet and *Kiki's Delivery Service* dir. Hayao Miyazaki (*Movies*)
- ☞ Mumford and Sons (*Music*)

Game inspirations:

Fiasco, by Jason Morningstar
Nobilis 3rd edition, by Jenna Moran
Archipelago II, by Matthis Majcher
Puerto Rico by Andreas Seyfarth
Polaris, by Ben Lehman
Gnomic by Pete Suber
Happy Birthday, Robot and *Do: Pilgrims of the Flying Temple* by Daniel Solis

Ou est Monsieur Bredbleau?
 --"le Grande Morte"



30

Time waits for no man, but
 the clocktower of St. Al-
 bans might stop for a cer-
 tain young lady.

☞ -Time's Arrow Points to Me



This is an Open Source Game

So please, play it and modify it and make it your own. And share it on the internet and let me know if you do any of those nifty things with it. Contact me at nickwedig@yahoo.com.

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Or if you have a barcode reading smartphone, simply scan this barcode thing:



Because the rules are randomizerles, verbal-based and self-modifying, this game would be well suited for play online via IM or wiki or email or whatever. To aid in this course of action, a raw text version is available so that you can use it to seed your wiki or copy and past info where you need it, or whatever else you need to do to get playing. You can find the raw text by pointing your browser to <http://nickwedig.libraryofhighmoon.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Death-Takes-A-Holiday-raw-text.txt>

Or if you have a barcode reading smartphone, simply scan this barcode thing:



Story Sheet:

☐ "Yes, and..."

☐ "Yes, but..."

☐ "No, and..."

☐ "No, but..."

☐ "But only if..."

☐ "That's a funny story actually..."

☐ "Try it a different way"

Perdido Island

✎ Has a population of approximately 40,000 (which means an average of one death per day). About half the population lives in the town of Fable's Demise

✎ Is made of bones and skeletons

✎ Is a dark and somber place where no light shines brightly and regret overwhelms other emotions

✎ Holds the Veil of Souls, gateway to the Afterlife

✎ Is fundamentally a modern day American city in terms of social norms, technology and legalities, though it is anachronistic in aesthetics and style.

✎ Has many areas that Death forbid anyone enter while He is away, and these spaces contain mysteries

✎ Can occasionally be accessed by still-living mortals who discover the appropriate rituals

- ☐ "Yes, and..."
- ☐ "Yes, but..."
- ☐ "No, and..."
- ☐ "No, but..."
- ☐ "That's a funny story actually..."
- ☐ "Try it a different way"

Boxmuller and Sons

☞ Had Hopewell Boxmuller's apartments on the second floor

- ☐ "Yes, and..."
- ☐ "Yes, but..."
- ☐ "No, and..."
- ☐ "No, but..."
- ☐ "That's a funny story actually..."
- ☐ "Try it a different way"

☞ Sells some kind of quirky, anachronistic good (figure out as a group what it is –perhaps old sideshow props, like paper-mache mummies and Fiji Mermaids?).

☞ Mainly caters to tourists

☞ Is perpetually in debt

☞ Has no employees beyond the Boxmuller family

☞ Has strange things in the attic

The Bone Orchard

☞ Is accessible by entering a grave marked “Fisher” that can be found in the third row of every graveyard

☞ Is made of bones and skeletons

☞ Is a dark and somber place where no light shines brightly and regret overwhelms other emotions

☞ Holds the Veil of Souls, gateway to the Afterlife

☞ Is fundamentally a modern day American city in terms of social norms, technology and legalities, though it is anachronistic in aesthetics and style.

☞ Has many areas that Death forbid anyone enter while He is away, and these spaces contain mysteries

☞ Can occasionally be accessed by still-living mortals who discover the appropriate rituals

- ☐ “Yes, and...”
- ☐ “Yes, but...”
- ☐ “No, and...”
- ☐ “No, but...”
- ☐ “That’s a funny story actually...”
- ☐ “Try it a different way”

Your Boxmuller:

☞ Has few ties back to the mainland

☞ Cares about the Boxmuller to their left

☞ Has been granted the ability to see how someone will die,
just by looking at them

☞ Has been granted the ability to see spirits and ghosts

☞ Has fond childhood memories of the island

☞ Did something shameful in their past that they now wish to hide

☞ Has difficulty expressing their emotions

☐ "Yes, and..."

☐ "Yes, but..."

☐ "But only if..."

☐ "No, and..."

☐ "No, but..."

☐ "That's a funny story actually..."

☐ "Try it a different way"