

MISSPENTYOUTH

issue 0

only 10 bucks

the greatest enemy
of truth!

I'll bastards &
riot grrrls!

"If you want a picture of the
future, imagine a boot
stamping on a human face --
for ever"
George Orwell

a ROLEPLAYING GAME
by ROBERT BOHL

Misspent
Youth

To see updates on the full, final version of this game, check out the game's site:

<http://misspentyouthgame.com/>

If you have any feedback on how to make this game better, feel free to write me at

rob@misspentyouthgame.com

You can write me there too if you just want to be enthusiastic at me. I'll happily receive that.

If you do like the game, I'd encourage you to write about it on the internet. If you have nowhere you can talk about these kinds of games, allow me to suggest a few places:

<http://indie-rpgs.com/>

<http://story-games.com/>

<http://forum.rpg.net/>

If you'd like to use the rules of this game to make your own, just ask me. I'll probably say yes.

The manuscript for Misspent Youth was written mostly on stolen time at work and on work-owned machines in Word XP and 2008. It was laid out in Adobe InDesign CS3 on a MacBook Pro. It is printed in variations of the Obsolete, 1942 Report, American Typewriter, Got heroin?, Myriad Pro, Minion Pro, Times, Helvetica Neue, Courier, and Stencil fonts. There's other technical information, but this is as boring as I'm prepared to be right now.

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MISSENT YOUTH

Ashean
Edition!

A Letter From the Publisher

Here are some music, movies, TV shows, & people that give you an idea of the vibe I'm going for with Missent Youth. Too bad paper doesn't have hyperlinks. Yet.

[MUSIC:] Rage Against the Machine, Anti-Flag, Bikini Kill, Public Enemy, Dead Prez, Cocksparrer, Stiff Little Fingers, The Clash, Ani Di Franco, Year Zero by Nine Inch Nails, English Rebel Songs 138-1984 by Chumbawamba.

[MOVIES:] A Clockwork Orange, ET: The Extra-Terrestrial, A Seaman Darkly (also, the book by Philip K. Dick), The Corporation, The Animatrix: Kid's Story, Stand By Me, The Goonies, Home Alone, Mean Creek, The Breakfast Club, Ocean's 11 (2001), Suburbia (1984), SLC Punk!, Logan's Run

[TV:] The Boondocks, Avatar: The Last Airbender

[Books:] Little Brother by Cory Doctorow, Feed by MT Anderson, His Dark Materials by Philip Pullman, King Dork by Frank Portman, Snow Crash & The Diamond Age by Neal Stephenson, Runaways by Brian K. Vaughan

[PEOPLE/MOVEMENTS:] Monkeywrenching, Noam Chomsky, Morgan Spurlock, Michael Moore, The Weather Underground, Earth First!, The Open Source Movement, The Yes Men, Malcolm X, Howard Zinn, Mario Savio, The Yippies

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Introduction



Welcome to *Misspent Youth*. This is a fucking awesome game. You're going to have fun with it. In fact, the fun in this game is so highly concentrated that it violates drug laws in some jurisdictions.

Misspent Youth is a science-fiction game about friendship and rebellion. It's a roleplaying game, which means that you create a world and pretend to be people you're not. It's a story game, which means that you use the game to create a story in real-time as you play it.

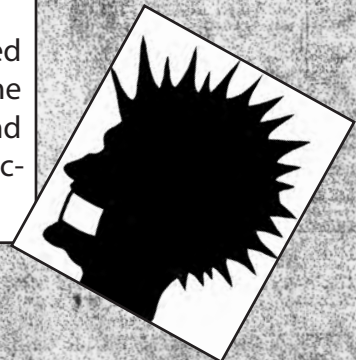
The protagonists in the game are called Youthful Offenders (or YOs), and are kids between 12 and 17 years old. The antagonist is called The Authority, and it is the force that's fucking up the world and making it a shitty place to live. One person will play The Authority, and the others will each play a single YO.

While you are primarily responsible for one character, you need to be open to the others' opinions about what makes a good story, and you need to be vocal with your own ideas too. Don't be a pushy asshole about it, but share your ideas and expect others to do the same.

I love English, but it's fucking stupid about some things, especially the he/she problem. I'm going to single-handedly cure centuries of sexist language by pluralizing third-person singular pronouns in the text. When this would sound stupid, I'll randomize the gender, but most of the time I avoid this bullshit altogether by speaking to "you."

What you need

To play *Misspent Youth* you need 4 to 6 people, two six-sided dice, paper, pencils, poker chips (or some other markers, one unique set for each player), and someplace you can be loud and not distracted (you might try playing in the lawn furniture section of your local Mega*Mart, for example).



The Greatest Enemy of Truth



Since everyone needs to buy into the villain, and since a good antagonist helps you create protagonists you give a shit about, you create that bad guy as a group at the start of the game.

After you create the Authority, you flesh out some of the details of the world and then make up the Clique that the Youthful Offenders are a part of. Once these steps are done, you can get to creating the little badassess that are going to raise all that hell.

Authority Creation

First, decide which of you is going to get to play the bad guy. This person is The Authority. The Authority plays the force that is at the center of what's wrong in the world. This player is also responsible for making sure that each scene in the episode hits all the points it's supposed to, frames most of the scenes, and is the one who decides when you're starting a mechanical conflict in each scene.

I know that's a lot of shit to digest but don't worry about grokking all of it right now. I'll get to explaining what all of it means later. Stepping up and taking on the role of The Authority is a big job, but it's a hell of a lot of fun to play the villain.

Now you have to make up The Authority. The Authority is about power and control. It attacks freedom and joy. Whatever makes the YOs happy makes it fucking furious. The most important thing to do when creating The Authority is

to think about the shit that powerful people do in real life that makes you personally outraged and give The Authority those characteristics. That kind of tension makes you really eager to play people rebelling against the bad guy. If someone proposes an Authority that you don't care about, that you can't imagine wanting to fight against, say so. This goes double if you're the one who's going to play The Authority; make sure that you can get excited about embodying this antagonist for everyone.

You might already have an idea for what you want The Authority to be, or you might want to examine the options below and build a villain from the ground up. Either way is cool.

As you make decisions about what The Authority will be like, write them on a sheet of paper that's going to be shared with the entire table. You don't have to make all the choices in the order presented here; feel free to skip some and come back to them, or later re-evaluate your earlier ideas in light of how The Authority developed. Note also that at times during this process you are given a list of things to choose from. The Authority you have in mind will probably be able to be described by more than one of the choices you're given, but select only one. For example, while The Authority may be both greedy and afraid, make a firm decision about which is window-dressing and which it's really *about*.

The Authority has the following characteristics:

- **Name**
- **Description**
- **Vice**
- **Visage**
- **Victim**
- **Need**

Name & Description

You don't have to name and describe The Authority at the out-

set, but do it before you finish. The description is just a sentence or three about what this thing is; use it to explain the choices you make about its Vice, Visage, Victim, and Need.

Vice

The Authority's Vice is its underlying motivation. Why does it do what it does? What's at the root of all the fucked-up shit it's engaging in?

Choose one of the following:

Sadism: A sadistic Authority gets off on causing pain. The agony it gets its jollies from may be physical, psychological, or both.

Greed: This Authority is driven by an insatiable and undeniable hunger. Most of the time it's out for money, but obsessive acquisitiveness can be felt for shit other than the dollar.

Fear: The Authority's full of bluster and shit, but at base it's just a scared little kid. Most bullies are motivated by fear, but watch out: this doesn't make them any less likely to bust your head open.

Stability: This Authority is all about keeping things exactly as they are now. It hates a world of constant change and finds this one perfect and controllable.

Utopianism: Utopian Authorities think they know what's best for you, and they really believe whatever fucked-up scheme they have will make the world a better place. Watch out for what "better" means, though, 'cause it sure as shit ain't gonna be something you'll like.

Visage

What form does The Authority take? The face it wears tells you how you're gonna attack it and take it down.

Choose one of the following:

State: The Authority is the cops, the courts, the Feds, the holder of "legitimate" reins of power.

Corporate: Business interests,

big or small. Could be anything from a street gang to an interstellar megacorp. Whatever the scale it's got one principal: make it for a dollar and sell it for two (or ten).

Religious: They say they got a direct line to God, or a dead sci-fi writer, or the Transcendental Loving All, or whateverthefuck. They'll operate out of received wisdom that can't be challenged and whisper soft words while they tape your mouth shut.

Personal: It's just one guy! Someone with personal magnetism and a vision. Should be easy to take out, right?

Systemic: This kind of Authority has no face to spit in, no body to threaten, no headquarters to stinkbomb. It's a process: a drug culture, a civil paranoia, a way of thinking or doing things.

Victim

The Victim is whatever the Authority is killing, consuming, ruining, perverting, controlling, and fucking up.

Choose one of the following:

Humanity: It chews up people somehow. Usually that means killing them; sometimes it means enslaving them or shredding their sanity.

Nature: The Authority commits crimes against nature, the world, animals, plants, and natural processes. This could be clear-cutting tree-whackers, a twisted asshole who likes to hurt puppies, or a cult in a creepy house on the hill churning out four-assed monkeys.

History: These are the kind of people who put out history books that say America was this big empty land waiting for white people to come and build strip malls.

Progress: Why change things? Everything is just fine how it is now, right? This Authority usually wants to stop technology from getting out of its hands, but sometimes it gets all squicked out by social change, like the wrong combinations of people getting away with kissing each other.

Freedom: Freedom of choice, speech, religion, the press, movement, all of these things and more are anathema to The Authority. People sometimes say inspiring things, print embarrassing facts, and go places they shouldn't. The Authority believes in total lockdown.

Need

This is a sentence or two which says what The Authority wants and what will happen if it gets its way. What would happen if the YOs didn't exist? If you're playing The Authority, make sure this is something exciting to you. This is important. It's going to drive most of your actions and it'll be central to how you roleplay The Authority and its agents.

World Creation

Now that you know what The Authority looks like and whose cookie jar it's got its hands in, it's time to figure out what kind of world you're kicking around in.

Example: Authority Creation

Our group discusses what kind of bad guy we'd like to see and what kind of authoritarian bullshit pisses us off. We love the idea of a villain that thinks it's helping you, one that is in fact helping you, but which is really violent and ugly if you don't do what you're told. The hypocrisy of a thoroughly violent villain that talks all the time about taking care of its people really engages me, and since I'm also a mouthy prick, I volunteer to play The Authority for this series.

We decide we've got this magical Utopia where everything is handed to you, but where people are killed when they reach the age of 18. Let's say there were a group of policemen dedicated to preserving this order called the Morpheans.

We put down "Morpheans" as The Authority's name. The description we give is: "The police force which collects people when they run away from the sacrifice ritual, or when they disobey the strict edicts of society."

So what do we want the Vice to be? Well, they probably engage in some pretty violent acts, but violence is really a means to an end for the Morpheans, and pain is merely a consequence of that. Ok, so Greed? Well, being a Morphean probably has its perks but we don't feel that's what these villains are about. Fear? Well, yeah, this whole control thing--especially the part about killing kids when they get too old--could be motivated by a paranoid fear. We write that down as a possibility. Stability? Yeah, it definitely wants to preserve the status quo, so that's a strong one too, and we record it. But then, oh boy, Utopianism. Yes, this is definitely a Utopian Authority. So we've got to choose between Fear, Stability, and Utopianism. Fear would be more

active, and Stability feels very right, but given The Authority we have in mind there's nothing as strong as Utopianism, so we write that down for Vice.

For Visage, you could argue that at root the game is about the Systemic Authority that uses the Morpheans as its pawns. There probably aren't any businesses if you're given everything you want by the government, so Corporate is out. There's something creepily faith-based about the society we have in mind so Religious is a possibility. We don't see a single strong-man at the center, so Personal is out. However, since we're really motivated by the Morpheans--the cops--so much so that that's the description we gave The Authority, it's clear to us that we're more interested in dealing with the police force itself as the bad guys. So that makes State the Visage.

Now what are they preying upon? This is tough. The Morpheans kill people (Humanity), they have created a domed bubble city where all the natural life is controlled (Nature), they have eradicated the history of this culture (History), they do not permit any social or technological forward movement (Progress), and they certainly control the actions and activities of the populace to a great degree (Freedom). However, we decide that the thing that bothers us the most and is going to make us most motivated is how it's killing people when they get too old. So we'll go with Humanity as the Victim.

Finally, the Need. This is kinda hard, too. It's rather passive to just say that society will stay the way it is. I mean, that's clearly what the Morpheans want but it doesn't provide a lot for you to fight against and be angry about. Maybe if the YOs don't win, the human race will die off when the machines that provide for it eventually break down.

You're going to create some sci-fi tropes, give the game a "rating," decide what themes you want to be important in the game, figure out what's going to unite your YOs, and decide what characters should be in the cast.

Motifs

First, you come up with your Motifs. In this stage, each player (including The Authority) creates a science-fiction trope in the world. These facts get used to help generate plot points and help you create characters on the fly.

The Motifs the Youthful Offenders come up with empower the Authority in significant ways, so it can be helpful to do theirs first. Make sure you come up with really horrible shit so you can make characters who'll be pissed off about it. Don't make it such a total lockdown that there's no room for your YOs to kick up some trouble, but give The Authority teeth.

The Authority then creates a sci-fi fact that empowers the YOs. Your forces as The Authority are very strong right now, so it's important that you give the YOs a crack into which they can slip and cause lots of damage. It's important that the kids not be given the store, nor that they be totally neutered.

This sci-fi-y shit can be technological (laser guns! flying cars!

mimetic drugs!) or it can be social (galactic imperium! families are illegal!). Make sure to communicate a lot here. People can get stumped; help them out when you see them struggling or ask for help when you're stuck.

It's also important that anyone can call bullshit on something if they think it sucks. You shouldn't let something get thrown into the setup if it's going to bug you. Let's say someone shouts "laser guns and flying cars!" and you were thinking something much more grounded. Say so! But just saying "bullshit" probably isn't the best way to go about it. Suggest a way that you could use some part of the original idea that'll be interesting to you, or at least explain why it doesn't work for you.

Finally, make sure that you don't play before you play. It can be fun to come up with tons of Motifs and really flesh out the world. However, if you lock down all of these details too early you won't have anything to create or explore in the game. Not to mention you won't get around to actually playing the fucking game. Limit yourselves to *one* Motif per person, and try to vary them so that the Motifs don't just repeat or embellish one another. You'll be coming up with one Motif at the end of each ses-

sion. If you have more ideas, you can introduce them during play and make them important enough to get upgraded into permanent elements of the setting.

When you've got these worked out, record them somewhere central so everyone can refer to them in later stages.

Rating and Themes

What kind of a game do you want to have? What content should be in it, and what shouldn't? How "adult" is it gonna be? This is important stuff to talk about so you don't freak someone out later.

First, decide on a rating for the game. You might use your country's film board's ratings, or the video game or television rating system. Look into what goes into these ratings; you might find out some interesting stuff. For example, you can only say "fuck" one time in a PG-13 movie.

Next come themes. These are things that are going to come up a lot in play and you can use them to flesh out your characters and as seeds for plot twists and story ideas. Pick three that you want to see explored and "on the table" during your game:

Example: Motifs

Dave is first out of the gate for Motifs empowering the Morpheans, and says that every kid born has a little stone implanted in her palm that shows how close to getting kakked she is.

Rachel comes up with the idea that the society is constructed such that any pleasure you could want for is provided to you without cost or effort and that denying pleasure to one another is considered a deeply aberrant act. Her idea here is that everything being easily available to the citizens makes them complacent, and that the mandatory free-love thing makes it hard to form lasting romantic relationships that might get in the way of the systems of control.

Don wants laser guns. That makes Joanna wince. She likes the trend in sci-fi lately that's moved back toward bullet-guns and laser guns stretch her suspension of disbelief. She tells Don this and suggests that maybe they have a wide array of futuristic, non-lethal weapons that they're always trying out on people. He likes this and suggests some of the possible weapons, like will-sapping foam and mists that reduce

victims into states of joyful incapacitation.

They groove on all the ideas they could play with here but come to realize they're playing before they play, and refocus.

Joanna suggests that maybe the hand-chips are also tracking systems. That's fine, but Phil (who's playing The Authority) points out that it's really just a feature of Dave's idea. Joanna modifies her Motif and says that part of the culture involves a daily "Sharing Ceremony" in which kids meet with randomly-assigned people and report their movements for the day past.

This is a lot for Phil to work with. So much, in fact, that it's a little hard for him at first to decide what to give to the kids to empower them against The Authority. He asks for help after being stumped for a bit, and eventually the group comes up with a solution. The YOs live in an arcology that has some sectors that have been written off by the Morpheans as too dangerous. In these abandoned places, wild people live. That gives the YOs someplace to avoid surveillance and to escape to. Joanna suggests they might be able to find secret allies there.

- Sex
- Race
- Class
- Faith
- Gender
- Drug use
- Violence
- Hate speech
- Homonegativity
- Other

Again, record this centrally so you can refer to it as you create characters and the world, and as you create stories together.

The Clique

What kinds of rebels are you going to be? Are you a band? A skate club? Rogue EMTs? What draws you together and why do you stick together? Come up with something interesting and grabby. I pretty much guarantee that if you say “classmates,” you’ll be bored. At least make them classmates that are in detention together all the time.

Once you’ve figured out what your characters are as a unit, decide if you want to give yourselves a name. Once that’s worked out, put the name and a brief description on the world document.

Now comes casting. Brainstorm a bunch of character concepts that should be in the game. Treat it like you’re TV writers figuring out who your recurring cast is. Come up with about twice as many concepts as you’re going to need. The concept is best as a short, two or three word phrase; something flavorful, but brief. For example: “little hothead,” “dumb and strong,” “rich kid,” etc.

This part is like making microwave popcorn; at some point the ideas are going to come more slowly and eventually stop. Try reading the list off once or twice and seeing if anyone can think of any more. Once that’s done, move on to the next step.

One player reads off the concepts. When you hear one you really like, tell people. If no one else wants it, it’s yours. If someone else does, negotiate. You also might want to consider combining two of

these concepts. You can have a lot of fun slapping together shit that seems really weird at first: rock-star scientist, the badass coward, or the graffiti artist vigilante.

Once you’ve got your concepts, time to make your dude.

Summary: Authority Creation

1. Name
2. Description
3. Vice (choose one)
 - Sadism, Greed, Fear, Stability, or Utopianism
4. Visage (choose one)
 - State, Corporate, Religious, Personal, or Systemic
5. Victim (choose one)
 - Humanity, Nature, History, Progress, or Freedom
6. Need: what does it want, what drives it, what happens if it wins?



Summary: World Creation

1. Motifs
 - Sci-fi elements
 - One for each player
 - YOs’ Motifs empower the Authority
 - Authority’s Motif empowers the YOs
2. Rating
3. Themes, choose three of:
 - Sex
 - Race
 - Class
 - Faith
 - Gender
 - Drug use
 - Violence
 - Hate speech
 - Homonegativity
 - Other
4. Clique
 - What holds you together?
 - Name
 - Description
5. Casting
 - Two- to three-word character concepts
 - Twice the number of YOs
 - Choose which one you want, combine two or more if you like

Li'l Bastards and Riot Grrrls



Now that you know what The Authority is all about and you've done casting (p. 8), it's time to make the meddling kids that are going to beat the shit out of The Authority (or die trying). Don't keep shit to yourself when making your Youthful Offender; everyone else should get the chance to cheat off your paper. A lot of times if other players are stuck on one of their own decisions, hearing what you have can help unstick them.

As you make character creation decisions, put them on your Permanent Record, which you can photocopy out of the back of the book (p. 27).

Non-mechanical character features

All characters need to have a name, an age between 12 and 17, and a gender. You can make these choices now or wait until later. Characters also need to have three simple physical characteristics, each no more than two or three words (these are called "Looks" on your Permanent Record). When you're making up a story together, it helps to know what the characters look like. Note, however, that none of these are Traits (see below), and don't have any mechanical effects.

Traits

Traits are the basic game-unit of description for characters

and things. They act as flags that tell everyone what's important about your character and they remind you how to play your character.

There are two kinds of traits in Misspent Youth. Traits can be closed (which means you pick one from a list of five choices), or they can be open (which means that you write in a few words to create the trait). Closed traits help to give you a skeleton from which to build the character, where open traits let you flesh that skeleton out.

Closed traits aren't exclusive. Let's say you pick "Smart" for your Means trait when you're making your Youthful Offender. That doesn't mean you're not tough as well. It just means you're not Tough. It means she may be able to take a few knocks, but ultimately what she's about is being Smart.

Keep in mind what your character's about and play these things up. Other players will be looking at your traits a lot, too, to know how to act and what to do to have their YOs' actions matter to your character.

YOs have 5 traits: Mistreatment, Motivation, Means, Schtick, and Glitch. The first three are closed and the last two are open. Keep in mind that even when they're negative, traits are used to win

conflicts. You'll be saying stuff like, "No, now we're winning because of my (insert trait here)."

All of your traits start out "free" but they won't stay that way. While a trait is still free, it represents an aspect of your personality that is youthful, naive, and idealistic. Though free traits may sometimes be dark, they're still "pure." During game play you may find yourself about to lose a conflict to The Authority and decide "Nah, fuck that!" You can sell out (p. 20), win that conflict, and take on the "sold" version of the trait. For closed traits, these sold values are predetermined, but for open traits you erase the free trait and write a new, more fucked-up version to replace it. When you write down your closed traits on your Permanent Record, write the free one, then the sold one after it. This is so you can see where you're headed. I'll tell you more about selling out traits later (p. 20).

Mistreatment

There's got to be some reason that you can stay out till all hours of the night hacking



police systems to uncover dirt on the implants they're putting into prisoners or smashing the windows on upscale bistros that secretly serve human flesh. Clearly, your parental units are defective. This trait is about how they fail you.

Choose one of the following:

Abused: You're the victim of one or more kinds of abuse. Abuse sells out to Abusive: you're feeding back into the cycle.

Neglected: You're either an orphan or your parents are infrequent visitors in your life. Neglected sells out to Misanthropic: "People? Fuck 'em. I don't need them. They're a bunch of shits anyway."

Fostered: You're taken care of by disinterested caregivers: paid workers, robot nannies, etc. Fostered sells out to Cold: Emotions just don't matter that much.

Spoiled: You get everything you want, stay out as late as you want, buy whatever you want. Spoiled sells out to Selfish: You deserve to have every little whim satisfied.

Sheltered: Every corner was rounded off and you were never burdened with decisions as a kid. Sheltered sells out to Dependent: You can't do shit on your own.

Motivation

Most kids (and adults for that matter) respond to The Authority's bullshit by politely doing as they're told. You don't. Why not? What makes you so special? Why do you care what happens to other people? What the hell possesses you to put yourself in such danger?

Choose one of the following:

Outrage: You're filled with a pure, righteous anger. Injustice drives you bugfuck crazy and you won't sit still for it. Outrage sells out to Wrathful: You become consumed by a directionless spite that burns anyone in your way.

Pride: You know you're a worthwhile person who doesn't have to put up with this shit. Pride sells out to Arrogant: Not only are you good, you're better than everyone else, even your friends.

Altruism: You have this deep and undeniable need to help people in trouble. You can't help it, it's reflexive and sometimes it winds up fucking you. Altruism sells out to Manipulative: You've been a patsy long enough. It's time to get yours!

Optimism: The world wasn't meant to be this way and you can change it. Optimism sells out to Cynical: Yeah, you know how the world should be, you're just sure it's never gonna be that way.

Thrills: You're addicted to danger and there's nothing hotter than counting The Authority's coup. Thrills sells out to Nihilistic: Your need for sensation and danger intensifies to the point of self-negation.

Means

How do you go about fighting The Authority? What's your approach to problems? What are you good at?

Choose one of the following:

Tough: You're a badass, able to dish out and take physical punishment, able to withstand The Authority's psy-ops. Tough sells out to Brutal: You tend to take shit too far when it comes to

giving someone a thumping.

Bad: You're the bad kid, the outcast, the leather-jacket-wearer. You specialize at ostentatiously breaking rules. Bad sells out to Perverse: Now you're just being a freak for its own sake, engaging in some profoundly fucked-up behavior in a compulsive need to break every boundary.

Smart: You're a friggin' genius. Some people know a lot about one thing, you know a lot about most things and a ridiculous amount in a few areas. Smart sells out to Pedantic: You're always correcting people, pointing out small and irrelevant errors and needlessly flaunting how bright you are.

Cool: People want to be you or be with you. You break new ground constantly and when you talk to people you make them feel important. Cool sells out to Trendy: You've gone from a ground-breaker to an avid follower who fakes it.

Fast: Agility, athleticism, quick-wittedness; you're a ninjaweasel on crank. Fast sells out to Efficient: Everything is so much more ordered and directional now. That's better, right?

Schtick

This trait describes your main technique for beating The Authority. It could be a set of skills, a "job," or a particularly salient personality characteristic. You're the (insert Schtick) guy/girl. Write a short phrase to describe this trait. If it sells out, you will erase it and replace it with something darker.

Glitch

This is your heroic fatal flaw, a youthful and innocent failing that helps you beat The Authority even though it fucks with your life. You may not sell out Glitch unless you've sold out all your other traits. Write a short phrase to describe this trait. If it sells out, you will erase it and replace it with something darker.



Summary: YO creation

1. Non- traits

- Name
- Gender
- Age (12- 17)
- Looks (Three physical features)

2. Traits

- Mistreatment (How did your parents fail you?)
 - Abused/Abusive
 - Neglected/Misanthropic
 - Fostered/Cold
 - Spoiled/Selfish
 - Sheltered/Dependent
- Motivation (Why don't you obey?)
 - Outrage/Wrathful
 - Pride/Arrogant
 - Altruism/Manipulative
 - Optimism/Cynical
 - Thrills/Nihilistic
- Means (How do you fight?)
 - Tough/Brutal
 - Bad/Perverse
 - Smart/Pedantic
 - Cool/Trendy
 - Fast/Efficient
- Schtick (What's your specialty?)
- Glitch (What's your heroic fatal flaw?)

Example: YO Creation

I like Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash a little too much. Y.T. is practically the reason this game exists. So I want to make a character like her but I don't want to be a lameass copier.

Anyway, our Clique is going to be an illegal courier service, and I pick the "crazy-overconfident chick" and "the innocent" as concepts. I decide to name her Randy, and that she's going to be a 15-year-old girl.

At first, I'm kind of tempted to go with Abused or Neglected for Mistreatment, but then I remember she's supposed to be "the innocent." I decide that Sheltered seems to fit best; her parents never let her do anything, which was fucking maddening for her.

It doesn't take me even two seconds to decide that Randy's got to be Thrills/Nihilistic for Motive and Fast/Efficient for Means. No-brainer.

So after writing these down on my Permanent Record, I start thinking about what to do for a Schtick. I like the whole free-running acrobatics/parkour thing I've seen in some action movies lately. I decide I wanna go nuts: "Hot-as-hell parkour ninja delivery girl!" The exclamation mark is central to the trait, and it must be spoken in a single breath.

Now for Glitch. I think I need to address the whole innocent thing a little more, and I want to give her a third dimension as well. So at first I'm thinking something like "Trusts too easily" or "Reckless with more than her ass" or "Talks a big game but is actually pretty innocent." I ask my friends for help because I think all these suck. We come up with "In over her head." I like it 'cause it's got levels to it.



Death or Glory? Just Another Story

Each episode of *Misspent Youth* takes place over seven scenes which are intended to model the "three act structure" common to many movies, TV shows, plays, and novels. Episodes start with questions the YO players ask of each other about their friendship. The game then moves on to the seven scenes, which are:

1. **Exposition**
2. **First Plot Point**
3. **Heating Up**
4. **First culmination**
5. **Midpoint**
6. **Climax**
7. **Denouement**

There's another type of scene that lives in the gooey middle of the ones mentioned above: **the interstitial scene** (more later on that).

Friendship Questions

At the start of each episode, ask the Youthful Offender player to your left a question about the friendship between your characters. Either the question or the answer must introduce an **Authority Figure (AF)**, a character or force that belongs to The Authority. If you don't introduce an AF in the question, then you strand your friend with coming up with one in the answer.

The question doesn't have to be something that was asked in-character. Decide that between yourselves. It's also supposed to be about something that's happened in the characters' past together, or between episodes. You can make up huge things a character's background at this stage. For example: "After we slept together why didn't you want to tell your big brother?" (The big brother is apparently an Authority Figure.) Don't abuse this "power." If you introduce something shitty about your friend's character that's going to ruin it for her, you're an asshole. Check with her if you're going to put something out there that you think might freak her out and be willing to retract it if it does.

Example of FQs in action

Bret, Daniel, Julia, Terry, and I decide to play a game of *Misspent Youth* about Native Americans in the Aleutian Islands in the near future. The Authority (played by me) is the Bureau of Indian & Wildlife management, which is a State authority that's motivated by a desire for Stability and whose Victim is Freedom. In an effort to preserve what little marine life is left, it is trying to institute a global monoculture in the oceans and oppressing these Native kids and their culture. The Themes for the game are race, drug use, and sex, and the Clique are a group of survivalists and genetic modders who ironically call themselves The Noble Savages. The starting motifs include:

- Cybernetic bat-kraken which consumes aberrant genotypes. (Auth)
- Media are on a "save our oceans" kick which actually is a tool to support the government crackdown. (Auth)
- The worst predictions of global warming have come true and resources to produce food are dangerously scarce. (Auth)
- The Bureau has produced nanopo-
pulations that can brainwash you and turn you into a spy. There are rumors that these conversion swarms are delivered via governmental food aid. (Auth)
- Native populations have a culture of gene hacking. (YO)

In the first episode, we come up with the following friendship questions:

If you're stuck on what to ask, take a look at the character's Permanent Record. There might be traits there you can work with. If you're still stuck, check out the motifs (p. 6) and themes (p. 7) for the series. Combining a motif, a theme, and/or something off the character sheet is a great way to get inspiration and to reinforce the feel of the world you set up together.

If there are Authority Figures that weren't used in the last session, you may choose to reuse them in your questions if you wish to do so.

The Authority needs to record the questions and answers at this stage in order to reference them later in the episode.

Lisa Whitebear (a 17-year-old extreme traditionalist/shaman girl played by Julia) asks Jamie Whaleseeker (a 15-year-old boy who is a videographer and too-fervent activist) "What use did you put to the recording of that ritual we did together?" Julia has left Terry to come up with an Authority Figure in her response: "I broadcast it. Sherriff Williamson thinks we're just loser kids playing games; if he saw what you were doing he would know what fear means."

Terry then turns to Bret, who is playing Pakku, a 17-year-old gene hacker and hunter. Terry's question is: "What ever happened to that awesome narwhalus that the two of us made?" Again, Bret is stuck coming up with the AF. He says, "I got the idea for chimerical creatures like that from Dr. Quincy Jenkins, the engineer of the Security Organism Beta (the cyberkraken), and I found myself disgusted with what we created. It's not what I'm trying to do. I want to take pride in our past, our history, our traditional ways. This isn't art, it's restoration."

Bret then has to ask a question of Daniel, who is playing Lukaq, the 17-year-old hackerboy extraordinaire who is something of an odd duck in this group for his love of modern technology. Bret decides that he's going to author something significant about both characters with his question: "I outed myself to the elders for you; why did you choose Adam 'Rotaru' Burke (a mid-twenties white-guy wannabe) over me?" Daniel is okay with his character being gay or bisexual. I ask whether Rotaru or the council is the AF, and Bret says that they both are. Daniel then responds for Lukaq, "I know you caught flak when the elders found out, but you're a traditionalist and I have ambitions bigger than this village." Everyone oohs at how coldhearted that is, and the players decide that this is not something that's been openly communicated in either direction.

Finally, Daniel has to ask about Lukaq's relationship with Lisa. He asks, "Why can't you accept Rotaru into the group?" Since Rotaru is an already-introduced AF, technically another one is required, but since two were provided in Bret's question to Daniel, I am okay with it if Julia doesn't want to introduce another one. However, Julia has an idea, and says: "How can you trust any white person? Clark Archer came to our village and was friendly at first, but then out came the bibles. Anyway, Rotaru's gonna leave when you do."

Scene Framing

Scene framing means describing how a scene starts out. For almost all scenes, The Authority has this power. He says where things start, who's there, what the Clique are doing, and might even say how they're feeling or what happened just before the scene started. That doesn't mean he doesn't check in with everyone else both to see if it's okay with them, and to ask for help with ideas.

The YOs are assumed to be in every scene together—if not physically in the same location then it is assumed the action will cut frequently from one character to another, or they'll be in communication with each other. If you really don't want to be in the scene, tell The Authority player that and he can decide whether to honor that. Keep in mind though, the way conflicts work (p. 18) you might be fucking your friends over by not being available to be in the scene.

The Authority will also frequently tell you the purpose of the scene from the story-structure perspective. Work with him to try to achieve that purpose.

The Authority will use the themes, motifs, friendship questions, and Authority Figures to help him decide how to start and guide scenes. You'll see how this works in some of the examples.

Finding the Conflict

At some point in each scene, you're going to need to find a place for the conflict to happen. The first moment where the Youthful Offenders do something that The Authority would want to prevent, call for a conflict.

Or, don't. Let the first one go. The more they can get away with, the more creeped out they'll be, knowing that The Authority is going to do *something* in the scene.

The conflict doesn't have to happen in a moment of action, though that's often a good place for it. A moment of tension between the YOs is another good place to call for a conflict. Sometimes you can take a seemingly minor event and give it really big implications by making it the focus of a conflict.

Finally, it can also be helpful to go into the scene with an idea what the conflict might be. Be flexible, though; don't get so hung up on what you wanna see that you ignore the shit that comes up in the scene and should naturally be the focus of the conflict.

See p. 18 for more on conflicts.

Scene X: Interstitials

I'm going to start out the description of the story arc by not talking about the story arc yet. Instead I'm going to tell you about interstitial scenes.

Interstitials are the only kinds of scenes that YOs can frame. They're moments of character exploration which do not interact with any of the mechanics. Thus, there are no rolls to resolve conflicts and no selling out of traits (p. 20) in these scenes. Interstitials are more likely than other kinds of scenes to not contain all the Youthful Offenders.

Interstitials shouldn't focus on the plot elements of the game. If you see a scene starting to go toward addressing some point of plot, it belongs in one of the other scenes. Interstitials are supposed to be purely character-exploration moments. You want to avoid winding up with something that would be an important plot-development conflict in a mechanic-less scene.

The Authority may ask if anyone wants an interstitial between plot scenes, or a YO may ask for one.

Scene One: Exposition

The exposition scene usually serves to help us get to know the characters, see their interpersonal interactions, and maybe see them experiencing their everyday lives. Or, instead, you can start the exposition scene in the middle of some big, splashy action, though the purpose of this action is to give us an intense look at what the characters are like.

The exposition scene also establishes the inciting incident for the

episode. The inciting incident is the first important thing that pulls you into the story. When you talk about a movie and go, "It's about XYZ," that XYZ is probably the inciting incident. In Misspent Youth this is most often an attack on The Authority or a reaction to an attack by it.

The easiest way to come up with an inciting incident is to look at the motifs, themes, and friendship questions. Have an Authority Figure aggressively fuck with something that the players care about in a way that pulls in one or more of the motifs or themes you've been given to work with. The YOs' reaction will usually result in an inciting incident. Good YO players will participate in this process, too, helping the table come up with a bitey incident.

Scene One:

- Have a conflict
- Establish the inciting incident

Authority claims: 3 or 11

Example: Exposition

I would like to start the game with a scene that highlights the friendship in the Clique, and in reviewing the world document and the characters' traits—in particular, Lisa Whitebear's Schtick (Traditionalist MacGuyver) and Glitch (I am my people)—I notice how much of a large role tradition plays in the game. I decide to start the exposition scene with the Clique in a traditional sweat lodge. They are gathered there trying to achieve a communal vision.

After a few moments of fun interaction between the YOs, I introduce the problem: since two of the friendship questions center around Rotaru, the wannabe, I have this smarmy schmuck walk into the tent and fuck up the groove. The conflict is on, and I set the stakes (p. 18): if the Bureau

wins, Rotaru's presence will sow discord in the group as they reject Lukaq's boyfriend and ostracize him. If the YOs win, they will get a significant vision that will lead them toward what they need to do next to strike at the heart of the Bureau.

Lukaq asks Rotaru to leave the lodge to allow them to talk, and the talk gets ugly, quickly. Pakku's hurt feelings over being rejected come out, Lisa's massive discomfort with the whole homosexuality issue comes to the fore, and Jamie is completely freaked out by the fact that everyone is fighting. In the end, the dice in the conflict go my way, but Daniel decides he's going to sell out Lukaq's Bad trait to Perverse. As Pakku is in the middle of an impassioned speech, Lukaq interrupts it by kissing him, playing on his passions.

As it's a sell-out (p. 20), a pall settles over the group for a moment. However, they are able to have their important vision. They share a complicated vision of a recapitulation of the Adam and Eve myth, but with the gender roles reversed. Adam bites into an apple, and is led astray.

When they exit the lodge, I reveal that Rotaru (aka Adam), who was snacking on a government-surplus apple (employing the spy-swarm motif) during the sweat, has left with Pakku's computer, which contains all his gene-work. If the Bureau got its hands on the data in that machine it would be terrible for the Savages.

Thus the inciting incident is recorded: Rescue Rotaru and retrieve the data!

I ask if anyone wants an interstitial. Bret calls for one, and frames a quiet moment between Pakku and Lukaq, who are breaking down the lodge tent. Pakku clearly thinks that Lukaq means to start a relationship, and makes it clear that sex alone isn't enough for him. Daniel makes it clear that Lukaq is allowing Pakku to think what he wants.

Scene Two: First Plot Point

By this time, you know what the inciting incident is and you've seen where the Youthful Offenders are at emotionally, physically, and interpersonally. It's time to get shit moving. The first plot point scene should focus on a reaction to the inciting incident by the YOs, The Authority, or both.

Planning Phase:

What I find very useful at this stage is for all the players—including the one playing The Authority—to work out the outline of a plan that the YOs will implement to attack or defend from The Authority.

The planning phase is very helpful to you if you're playing The Authority. Take a look at the scene structure outline (p. 17) and map the steps of the plan onto the scene structure. Don't get married to this plan, though. The requirements of the structure and the outcome of conflicts will fuck it up. Know this. Expect this. Fucking celebrate when this happens. If the plan gets fucked sideways, ask the YOs how they're tinkering with their plan to cope with its having gone tits-up.

Also, when making the plan, keep in mind the abilities of the members of the Clique. Try to make sure that each YO has at least one element of the plan that plays into

his strengths. In particular, pitch the elements of the plan to YOs' Means and Schtick traits.

One last note on the planning phase: this can be in-character, out-of-character, or some monstrous hybrid. Ask what everyone's comfortable with and roll with that. You can try skipping the planning phase, but I wouldn't recommend it. A YO plan is a really helpful framework to build scenes around and the game might suck ass if you don't make one.

Implementation and Plot Point:

So now that they've got a plan, the YOs need to act on it. Role-play out the first phase, the one you've assigned to scene two. At some point in the scene you've got to introduce the first plot point. (p. 15)

Which kind of plot point to use will often seem obvious given what just happened in the story. That is to say, sometimes you'll be looking back at what's happened and saying, "Oh, that was a reversal."

Scene Two:

- React to the inciting incident
- Make a plan (optional)
- Act out the plan (if you got one)
- Introduce the first plot point
- Have a conflict

Authority claims: 3 or 11

The Authority in the Planning Phase

Sometimes players can get kinda freaked out by The Authority player getting involved in the planning, but this is not a great attitude to have about it. The person playing The Authority is another player at the table and is just as involved in making the story. In fact, as The Authority your main job is twofold: pretending to be people that piss off and scare the YOs, and making sure the group's story is moving forward. You're not there to fuck the YOs' plans over, and the other players need to know that.

You're telling stories about heroes, heroes who everyone wants to win if you've created an odious-enough Authority. In order for those heroes' win to be exciting their adversaries have to be fucking assholes that you're dying to see taken down. You and the YO players are both in this to make a great story together.

There are a few ways for The Authority player to get involved in the planning. What I find most productive and helpful is to ask the YOs what their plans are, then ask what steps they need to take in order to carry out the plan. If they're stuck on an element, or they're completely locked up, I'll usually say, "May I make a suggestion?" or "What if you do this?" You may notice I'm being really pussy-footish here, as though I don't believe my own claim that you're just another player who is there to make a good story. I talk this way because I don't want suppress others' input. Because of the fucked-up history of the RPG hobby, people might feel overly deferential to you. Keep an eye out for this and don't let them. Be polite, be gentle, or mock them for being wimps. Whatever works for you.



Example: First Plot Point

The YOs figure that their vision means that the spy-swarms are in the apples, and that Rotaru is an unwilling victim of the Bureau now. Lukaq uses his gear to determine that Rotaru is on his way to the university adjunct office where he works as an anthropological researcher. I introduce the plot point, a discovery. The computer-investigations reveal that there's a wild salmon preserve on the university grounds. While they still want to save Rotaru and the data, this is much more important. Pakku says that if he can get his hands on this DNA he might be able to reintroduce a genetically viable population of salmon back into the wild.

We now switch to some out-of-character conversation to work on the plan. I point out that they won't be able to just walk onto the university grounds since its work is so heavily funded by the Bureau. Bret says, "Well, obviously we have to get arrested," and that's immediately got everyone excited. The plan that gets worked out is that they will get arrested, get into (AF) Sheriff Williamson's station, get out of their cells during the middle of the night, get into the Sheriff's computer, fuck with the security on the campus, reprogram their own access IDs, get in, free Rotaru, take the salmon DNA, then clean Rotaru of the nano-bugs and release some engineered salmon into the wild.

I ask how they're going about enacting the first part of the plan. Terry says that since Jamie's kind of an impulsive kid, that he'd lead them to start smashing windows in the middle of town. So Williamson comes, and I call for the conflict. The stakes (p. 18) I set are: If the Bureau wins, they aren't going to arrest the kids. Instead, they're going to beat Jamie to within an inch of his life and hospitalize him. If the YOs win, they're going to get into the jail and Williamson will fuck up somehow such that they can get free in the night.

In the end, the YOs win their conflict by Pakku giving Williamson a homophobic panic, and they're tossed into the clink without adequate supervision.

Scene Three: Heating Up

This is where the plot really gets cranked the fuck up, and this scene is all about intense action or conflict between people. The YOs take in the first plot point, react to it, adjust their plan if necessary, and push forward. The plot point is intensified and further explored and new elements about it are revealed.

It's helpful to take a look at the reformulated plan and frame this scene around the next interesting part of it. During this scene you may also introduce another Authority Figure (one of the ones from the friendship questions perhaps) to fuck with the YOs.

Take some time to explore the plan here. This might be a longer scene than most others; in the classical plot structure, a large portion of the story takes place during this phase. This is a build-up to when the shit really starts to fly.

Scene Three:

- Deepen the investigation of the first plot point
- Introduce an AF (optional)
- Slow build to things getting really tough
- Have a conflict

Authority claims: 4 or 10

Example: Heating Up

The next scene is an obvious follow-on from the prior one: it's time for the kids to break out. I set the scene in the middle of the night and there's some fun narration about how they break out and how the cops' surveillance is so terribly fucked.

As the game is already pretty heavy with Authority Figures, I decide not to introduce a new one now. Instead, I add a mini-plot-point here. As Jamie is tooling around on the computer, he finds a cybersex chat log. He starts to read it and Terry plays him getting all freaked out. Jamie and tries to hide the log, but Lisa catches sight of it before he can. Rotaru and Williamson have been playing "hide the nightstick" online!

Again my stakes (p. 18) strike at the heart of the friends' unity. If I win, Lisa's

gay panic and all the ugly shit surrounding the Rotaru relationship is going to flare up into outright anger. In the ensuing fight, the kids will abandon the part of the plan where they save Lukaq's boyfriend. If the Clique wins, none of this matters and they get everything they need to make their way quietly onto the campus grounds.

In the conflict, Lisa begins to make some ground on her homophobic issues, seeing the sadness in Lukaq's face and recognizing it as thoroughly human. But then Jamie fucks it up by criticizing Lukaq for involving himself with such an asshole. Pakku saves the day by selling out (p. 20) his Neglected trait and Mis-anthropically points out that people fuck each other over all the time and the kids shouldn't let Rotaru's assholery get in the way of their mission. The kids leave the Sherriff's Office in possession of all the things they needed, as well as a cop car and a gun.

I call an end to the scene and Terry frames an interstitial on the way over to the campus. She wants a moment for the friendship to be healed and for people to talk about their feelings and how fucked up things are getting.

Scene Four: First Culmination

As the tension mounts, in this scene the Clique should seem close to achieving their goal effortlessly. Develop the plot further, have the earlier-introduced AF take a stronger role or pull another one in. You might even want to have the plan appear to succeed and the inciting incident end at this point. A false ending is a very fun way to go, and would introduce great dramatic irony since everyone knows it's not over yet.

Since the YOs should seem



close to things coming together (or believe they've achieved their goal), it might not be a good idea to have the conflict determine the success or failure of this part of the plan. If you choose to do that anyway and the YOs fail, you should consider how to end the scene on something of a high note.

Scene Four:

- Plan about to come together
- Conflict

Authority claims: 2 or 12

Example: First Culmination

This is the scene where things are going to go well for them, so I narrate them gliding easily through the security. There are a few fun interactions with the people along the way, and Lukaq follows his tracking whizbang stuff to Rotaru's office. There they find him slack-jawed with billions of tiny bug-things flying between his open mouth and the floor panels, like a line of ants swarming a lollipop.

I ask what they're going to do about it. It's pretty clear that he's in some kind of mental communication with the Bureau's AI and severing the connection could hurt him. The stakes (p. 18) here are: If I win, he's killed. If they win, he's converted to their cause. I win, and they let me, choosing not to sell out (p. 20).

So Rotaru is dead, but the data is safe. They get the samples of salmon DNA and get away as the klaxons start wailing.

Plot Points

Plot points are important things that happen in a story that intensify or take the story in new directions. Choose one of these. Feel free to kibitz over which one to use at the table, if that's your style.

Reversal: Shit goes from bad to good, or from good to bad.

You're following a small fighter craft toward a moon, only to realize it's not a moon after all.

Discovery: We learn something significant we didn't know before that makes everything that's come so far look completely different.

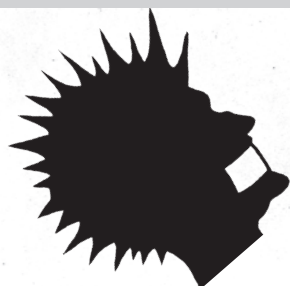
The bad guy turns out to be your dad.

Complication: Something gets in the way of the plan.

You escape the blockade only to have your hyperdrive fail on you.

Catastrophe: Something really fucked-up happens that seems to yank story off the inciting incident entirely.

A lovable rogue gets frozen in suspended animation and carted off to who-knows-where by the bad guys.



Scene Five: Midpoint

At this point in the story, the YOs have to be pushed to their nadir. All hope should seem lost and they're gonna have to scramble mightily to get their shit together. The Authority player needs to make the villains and situations as fucked-up, wrong, and cruel as the rating and themes (p. 7) for the series allow.

You can frame the scene around another about an element of the plan. If it seemed like the story was over in the last scene, though, this is where you pull out some fuckin' M.-Night- Shyamalan-twist shit: there's a whole part of the plot no one had any idea about!

As in the first plot point scene (p. 14), introduce another plot point here.

Scene Five:

- All hope is lost!
- Introduce a new plot point: reversal, discovery, complication, or catastrophe (p. 15)
- Have a conflict

Authority claims: 6 or 8

Example: Midpoint

Despite the death of Rotaru, the kids are on a high. Their data is saved and they have the DNA they need, and they're fleeing in a police car. Unfortunately, this is when the cops find out the car's been stolen. It's short work for them to determine what happened. As the Clique is racing along a mountain road, up from below the cliffs flies the hideous, bat-winged cyberkraken. This is the new plot point, a catastrophe.

The battle is on! The stakes (p. 18) are: the kids blow up the cyberkraken, or it crushes their cop car and sucks them up into the fleshy security cages in its torso. Pakku is a hunter, and he climbs out onto the roof of the car, crawls up inside the Security Organism and kills it from the inside, Skywalker style!

I can think of no way to drive them down from here. The cyberkraken was supposed to be the low point, but they beat the fucking thing, without even having to sell out (p. 20). Since I'm not allowed another conflict in the scene, and since it would be dickish of me to take away this vibe, I let them have their victory hooting and ignore that requirement of the scene.

Scene Six: Climax

Okay so the YOs are thoroughly fucked now, right? (Well, at least they should be, example text notwithstanding. I'm allowed to ignore the rules. I'm the fucking designer. Don't judge me!) Well this is the scene where they recover from their setback and directly confront The Authority.

This scene should address in the stakes (p. 18) of its conflict whether the YOs' plan will succeed or fail, whether they will be able to affect the change they want in the world. This is what it's all about. By the end of this scene, the inciting incident will be resolved definitively.

By the way, *the YOs don't have to win*. Tragedy can make great stories.

Scene Six:

- Do the YOs win or lose?
- Have a conflict

Authority claims: 5 or 9

Example: Climax

By this time almost all the potential energy contained within the inciting incident is expended. However, they still have to grow the salmon and get them out into the wild. I'm kind of tapped at this point so I go back and look at the friendship questions. A-ha! The tribal elders haven't been used yet.

I decide that the main tribal elder is Lisa's father. As they drive back to where Pakku does his cloning, they run into a roadblock that the elders had some goons set up. Lisa's dad demands she come out and give over what the government is seeking, peppering his comments with nasty homophobic comments.

If I win stakes (p. 18) in this case, Lisa's weirdness about gay sex and her fear and love of her father will win over and Lisa will turn over the material. At first the intent on the other side is to get the salmon released, but I point out that the negation of my intent results in their getting this. So instead we decide that if I lose, the conservative and assimilationist elements among the elders will be deposited.

The argument is vicious. In the end, Lisa wins by selling out (p. 20) her Abused trait to Abusive, shaming her father, outing the drunken violence he subjected her to, and breaking him in front of his people. When one of her friends is freaked out by this she snaps at him.

Scene Seven:

Denouement

Whew. It's over. Now what? Give yourselves a scene of reflection, recuperation, and maybe even retreat if you fucked up really badly in the last scene. This scene should be quieter, should give plenty of room for character exploration, and should ideally give a hint at what's ahead in the next session.

The scene should also be shorter than most. Don't overstay your welcome. A good way to get a handle on this scene is look at any friendship questions which haven't been addressed yet and explore them.

Scene Seven:

- Take a breather
- Reflect
- Have a conflict

Authority claims: 2 or 12

Example: Denouement

So the salmon are released, but now some work needs to be done on the friendship. They get together for another sweat in Lisa's lodge to talk about what happened and heal the relationship. After some free roleplaying, I call for a conflict. If the Authority wins, they are unable to come together now and the ugliness bleeds over until the next session. If they win, the manipulation that Lukaq perpetrated at the start of the session comes out and is healed in a healthy way.

The dice go their way, and the Clique is able to come together, stronger for what they've been through.

Aftermath

Finally, when the action and story is over, take a minute as players, entirely out-of-character, to talk about what you've just come up with together. Then come up with a Motif (p. 6) to add to the world creation document that you made when you started the series. Start out by determining whether the motif will empower The Authority or the Clique. Did the YOs win the conflict in the Climax scene? If so, the motif empowers them. Otherwise, it makes The Authority stronger. Then come up with something science-fictiony about the world that comes logically out of what happened in that session.

Summary: Scene Structure

Scene X: Interstitial

- No mechanics
- Happens at any time
- Framed by YO players
- About relationships, not plot



Scene One: Exposition

- Conflict
- Establish the inciting incident
- Claim: 3 or 11



Scene Two: First Plot Point

- Reaction to the inciting incident
- Planning (optional)
- Acting out the plan (optional)
- First plot point
- Conflict
- Claim: 3 or 11

Scene Three: Heating Up

- Deepening investigation of the first plot point
- Introduction of an AF (optional)
- Slow build to things getting really tough
- Conflict
- Claim: 4 or 10

Scene Four: First Culmination

- Plan about to come together
- Conflict
- Claim: 2 or 12

Scene Five: Midpoint

- All hope is lost!
- Introduce a new plot point: reversal, discovery, complication, or catastrophe
- Conflict
- Claim: 6 or 8

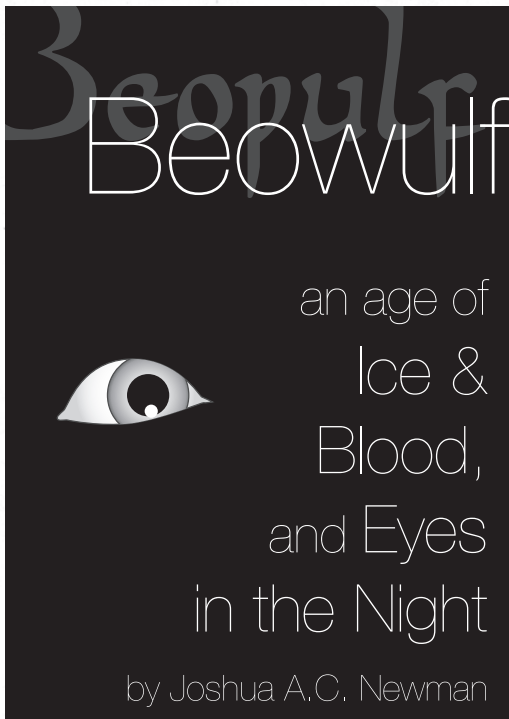
Scene Six: Climax

- Do the YOs win or lose?
- Conflict
- Claim: 5 or 9



Scene Seven: Denouement

- Take a breather
- Conflict
- Claim: 2 or 12



Throwing your Body upon the Gears

The conflict system is the part of the game we use to resolve actions by the Youthful Offenders that The Authority opposes. While you could just talk about whether certain things will happen or not, the conflict system allows for unexpected shit to happen and can lead to fun and exciting moments of storytelling which pull the story in new ways you could not previously anticipate.

You've got to have one (and no more than one) conflict per scene (p. 12). When the point in the scene arrives where The Authority would want to stop what the Clique are doing, that's usually a good place to start using the conflict resolution system.

All conflicts are between The Authority and the Youthful Offenders. If characters are fighting with one another, then mechanically what they're fighting against is The Authority's influence on their friendship. They're striving to stop that caustic presence from fucking up their love for one another.

Also, all conflicts are group conflicts. That is, in all conflicts all characters are assumed to be participating. If they're not there physically, then they can still take part in the conflict through the impact they've had as friends on those who are there.

Here's how conflicts work.

Calling a Conflict

The Authority decides when all conflicts occur. You should probably consult the other players before doing so, however. A good sentence to use when introducing the conflict is, "I think we've got a conflict here." Sometimes people want to play things out a bit before involving this system. Also, if another player says, "Hey I have an idea for a conflict," hear her out.

Stakes

The process begins when The Authority declares what it wants out of the conflict. An easy way to frame stakes is to say something like, "If I win," something happens. That "something" is one side of the stakes. Stakes should be a large-scale thing. You don't say, "If I win, you guys don't get the door open." That kind of smaller-grain detail will come through use of the conflict mechanisms. Instead you'd say something like, "If I win, you guys get bad data from the computer that's in the office behind the door."

The Authority then asks the others what will happen if the Clique wins the conflict. These stakes are mutually exclusive, and as such you're best served not just stating the opposite ("If we win, we get good data!"). Negation of my stakes is implied by you winning your stakes. Therefore, choosing stakes that are orthogonal to mine is probably more in-

teresting and fun.

You should negotiate both sides of the stakes until either outcome will make for an kick-ass story. If either side says, "I don't care if you win that," the other side probably has shitty stakes which should be reframed.

The Authority doesn't need to declare stakes first and if you're stuck, you can ask the YOs what they'd like. For that matter, if either side is stuck they should ask the table for suggestions on refinements.

Deciding stakes is probably one of the most important parts of the conflict process. Take time with it. But don't take so much time that you wind up not actually playing.

Take note of the stakes once they've been decided upon; I recommend restating both sides before you begin rolling. Maybe even consider writing them down for reference later.



Ok, if The Authority wins, the Cute Alien (C.A.) gets recaptured by the government scientists. If the YOs win, they get C.A. to his mothership with enough time for a tearful goodbye.

First Roll

The Authority never rolls the dice. The only people who roll dice in this game are the Youthful Offenders.

Take out a photocopied version of the conflict resolution map (pp. 30- 31) and set it on the table. The Authority declares what it's doing to get what it wants and to deny the YOs what they want. This declaration must be something that does not achieve its stakes, but rather will if unopposed.

Mickey, who is playing The Authority, says, "The Feds are on your tail. They know you sprung C.A. and send out an APB or something. Who's gonna stand up?"

At this point, The Authority asks if anyone's going to stand up. The first YO player to say that she will, or to grab the dice, is the one taking action.

Now I'm talking to you, YO players: do not say what you're going to do. I know you want to. I can hear your buzzing little brains. You've got all these awesome ideas! You want to pick up the dice and say, "I'm going to ninja block him then spit in his face and look awesome using my Fast trait!" Shut up! Don't speak! Don't do it!

It's ok to look at your sheet, review your traits, and think, "Do I have anything that applies here?" If you must it's even ok for you to come up with a plan. Don't get wedded to

it, though. And for god's sake, don't say anything yet. You'll see why later.

Ok, you've got the two six- sided dice. Now roll.

On the first roll, no matter what number you hit, you are countering what The Authority did. Pick a trait, put a marker on the number you hit on the conflict map, and write that number next to the trait on your Permanent Record. You cannot use that trait again for this conflict.

You then narrate what your YO is doing that would lead to success for the kids if The Authority let things stay as they are. This narration needs to make sense for the trait you chose.

Judd, who plays Ethan, says that he'll stand up. He rolls and gets an 8, which is not the best number he could have gotten, but almost.

Judd says, "Ethan's Smart and knows the back roads through the woods. He and his brother Matt get C.A. into the basket of his bike and he goes racing off in the woods toward the landing site."



The Authority now claims some numbers. In the "Death or Glory? Just Another Story" article (p. 12), each scene description gives two possible values for "Claim." You place an Authority marker on the conflict map on 7, and another Authority marker on one of the other two possible Claim numbers for that scene. This number should be on the opposite side of the line on the conflict map from the one that the YO rolled.

Mickey puts a marker down on 7. Since this is scene six, the climax, she can claim either 5 or 9. As 5 is on the other side of the line from Judd's claim, 8, she puts a marker down on 5.

But what if the YO claims one of the numbers that The Authority should have access to on the first roll? That's a two- part answer. If the number the YOs hit is something other than 7, you just choose the other number of the two available to you.

If Judd had hit 5 instead, Mickey would have to claim 9.

Allowed claim numbers by scene

- Scene 1, Exposition: 3 or 11
- Scene 2, First plot point: 3 or 11
- Scene 3, Heating up: 4 or 10
- Scene 4, First culmination: 2 or 12
- Scene 5, Midpoint: 6 or 8
- Scene 6, Climax: 5 or 9
- Scene 7, Denouement: 2 or 12

On the other hand, if the number the YOs hit is 7, then they lucked out big-time. The Authority chooses one of the two numbers available to her for the scene, and that's all.

Let's say Judd hits 7. Fucking awesome! Mickey grumbles and chooses 5 because it's her favorite number or something.

When the numbers are claimed, The Authority narrates how the YOs' actions are being countered, and what it's doing to achieve its intent.

Mickey says, "The Feds have you terrified, and as you're hitting bumpy patches in the trail your fear gets the better of you. You're in danger of losing control of your bike. Who's gonna stand up?"

Second Roll

Again, if you're first person to step up, you're the one who rolls. Again, do not state what you are doing yet. Planning is ok, keep your fucking yap shut, etc. Now roll.

At this point there are three possible outcomes: you will hit a number The Authority claims, you'll hit a number the YOs have claimed, or you'll hit an unclaimed number.

If you hit a number The Authority claims, the YOs have lost, and The Authority describes how. If you hit a number the YOs have claimed, you win! You describe how you get the stakes you declared at the start of the conflict using the trait you landed on. If you hit an unclaimed number, put a marker down on that number, write the number down next to a trait on your Permanent Record, announce what that trait

is, and narrate as in the first roll, above. The conflict then moves on to the third roll.

Judd has claimed 8 with Ethan's Smart trait and Mickey has claimed 7 and 5.

Eppy, who's playing C.A., grabs the dice. He rolls a 9. "I'm going to be using... C.A.'s Schtick, 'Psychic alien cutie-pie.' He takes control of the bike telekinetically and it rises up into the sky, passing in front of a full moon."

He puts a marker on 9, and the game proceeds to the third roll.

Selling Out

If you lose, you may choose to sell out one of your traits. If you do this, you steal victory from the jaws of defeat by acting like The Authority. You may only sell out traits that are free, and a sold trait can never be made free again. Also, you may only sell out a trait if you were the one who rolled the losing number (that is, you can't sell out your trait to save a friend from a failed roll that you did not make). If the trait is a closed one, permanently blacken out the free version of the trait. If it's an open trait, erase the old version and write a new one in, something darker and more Authority-tinged, and indicate that this is a sold-out trait in parentheses. Remember that Glitch can't be sold out



if you have any other free traits. From this point forward, the sold version is your trait for that category. It will never come back in play as the free version.

If you win by selling out, it's important that the narration include you acting in a really fucked-up way. Yes, you won, but you went too far and it changed you in some way. There should be a palpable sense at the table and from the other characters in their roleplaying that they acknowledge how fucked that was.

Should I Sell Out?

Just because you can win a conflict by selling out doesn't mean that you have to. Do you want to take the fiction in that direction? Is this the right place for you to lose? Might the story be even better for you losing? Would taking this moment to become a little more fucked-up make the game suck or feel wrong for you right now?

Ask yourself these questions, and take the time to consider them. Also, keep in mind that once any Youthful Offender has sold out all of his traits, that session is the last one of the series (p. 22). Are you ready to let it end yet? Has the Clique accomplished everything they wanted to?

Winning Through Someone Else's Trait

It's possible—quite likely in fact—that you will win a conflict by hitting a YO number you don't own. In this case, your character wins through the actions, influence, teachings, etc., of that character. Maybe you learned a trick from him, or you bucked up your courage because he's fighting beside you, or you saw how he deals with this kind of shit. Describe how you are winning with *his* trait.

Third and Future Rolls

The Authority now claims the lowest-ranked value that hasn't been claimed yet. The rankings, from lowest to highest, are 2 and 12, 3 and 11, 4 and 10, 5 and 9, and 6 and 8. If you can choose between two values at the same level, you must choose the one that has fewer claims on the same side of the line. If there is a tie, pick whichever number you want.

The conflict then continues as in the Second roll (p. 20). The first YO who chooses to stand up to The Authority rolls, and either claims a number if he hits an open number, loses or sells out if he hits an Authority number, or wins if he hits a Clique number. Continue in this way with The Authority claiming numbers from the bottom up, until the conflict is resolved.

Judd has claimed 8 with Ethan's Smart trait and Mickey has claimed 7 and 5. Eppy has 9 locked up with C.A.'s "Psychic alien cutie-pie" Schtick trait. Mickey has to claim 2 or 12, and since two of the three claimed numbers are on the same side as 12, she must claim 2.

"Hooray, you're flying," Mickey deadpans. "Too bad he doesn't know how to land the thing. The bike flips over and Ethan and C.A. are thrown to the ground. Who's standing up?"

Summary: Conflicts

Conflict

- One (no more, no less) per plot scene
- Happens when it's most dramatically interesting for The Authority to oppose the Clique
- Called for by The Authority player

Stakes

- Authority declares what it wants
- Clique declares what they want
- Stakes are mutually exclusive
- Set out the conflict map (pp. 30- 31)

First Roll

- NOTE: The Authority never touches the dice during conflicts
- The Authority says what it's doing
- The Authority asks, "Who's going to stand up?"
- The first YO player to respond or to grab the dice rolls

- Roll before you say anything about what you're going to do
- She places one of her tokens on the number she rolled
- She picks a trait, writes the number she hit next to it, and describes what she's doing to foil The Authority
- The Authority claims numbers
 - 7 and one of the other 2 numbers depending on what scene it is (p. 19)
 - Claim the one that has fewer numbers on the same side as it
 - If the YOs hit one of these two numbers, take the other
 - If they YOs claim 7 on their initial roll, The Authority only gets one of the two numbers for the scene
 - The Authority narrates how she is countering the YO's move

Second Roll

- The Authority asks who's standing up
- The first person to respond or grab the dice rolls
- At this point the YOs either win, lose, or the conflict goes forward
 - Win if they hit one of their numbers, describe how you win through that trait
 - Lose if they hit an Authority number, Authority describes how they lose
 - The YO rolling may choose to sell out a trait to win
 - Goes forward if an unclaimed number is hit
- If an unclaimed number is hit, place a marker, pick a trait, narrate how you're pushing
- The Authority takes the lowest possible number, and if she has an option, chooses the less- claimed side of the board
- The Authority narrates how her forces are acting

Third and Future Rolls

- Continue this process
- Ask who's standing up
- The YO who calls out or grabs the dice first goes
- Rolls, either wins, loses, or the conflict continues

End of the Line

The last episode of a series is reached when one of the Youthful Offenders has sold out her last trait. At the end of that episode, create your motif and then it's time to figure out endgame.

For Your Character

If you have more sold-out traits than free traits, then you've given up on the struggle and have become just another asshole adult who's likely to push people around. Yeah, sure, you did good back in the day but conformity is around the corner. Narrate what happens in your character's life after the series is over with this in mind.

If you have more free traits than sold out ones, you grow up but you don't become part of the machine that grinds up everything good in the world. You've managed to enter your adulthood with a spark of that idealism and freedom intact. Narrate what happens in your character's life after the series is over with this in mind.

If you're in a position to have this hopeful ending, you can give it up to redeem someone. You may choose to sell

out the rest of your traits (make the changes to your Permanent Record) and liberate one of your friends who ends the game sold out. Narrate how you accomplish this. The first person to claim this privilege for a particular YO is the one who gets to do it for him.

If you've been saved in this way, you can't sacrifice yourself to save someone else. You're stuck with being happy. Deal.

For the Clique

Look at what the kids have gone through together, and what they're like at the end. Discuss what the future of their friendship is, whether or not they stay together, and what happens to them when they grow up and grow apart (or together).

You can use things like whether someone is sold out or not, whether one person saved another, and the nature of the sold-out traits the YOs have to figure this out.

For the World

Now you need to decide what happens to the world at large. Does The Authority get its Need? Do the YOs write a new future?

Review the motifs (p. 6) that have been added to decide what happens next. Are most of them hopeful and positive or are they mostly new systems of control? Remember, if the Climax conflict was lost by the Clique, it will be something that empowers The Authority and if the YOs won that conflict, it will empower them. The balance here will determine it's a positive, tragic, or mixed ending, and will tell you what that future looks like.

the shockwave
of the future
crashes into you.

shock social
science
fiction

joshua a.c. newman

v.1.1



Exercising Your Authority

Guide the Story, Don't Control It

As Authority, you got two jobs: play a fun bad guy that the YOs wanna fuck with, and make sure all the story-structure shit is happening like it's supposed to. In a lot of roleplaying games, the "GM" (the common term for The Authority role in this game) is responsible for the story and the other players are responsible for their characters.

That's kinda true for Misspent Youth, too. However, being responsible for story doesn't mean it's your baby alone. YO players are responsible for their characters, but they take input from you and from one another during character creation and during play. The YOs likewise have the every right and responsibility to create new things, push the story forward, and so on.

Here's a "secret." You want the YOs to win just as much as they want to win. Also, none of the choices you make can stop them from winning. It's true. Take a close look at the conflict system (p. 18) and you'll see. Wanting them to win and wanting to make a great story are not incompatible with playing tough opposition that makes them feel pushed to the breaking point. Being driven down hard like that makes an eventual heroic comeback exciting. It's being driven like that, also, that can make failure in the end so heartbreaking and wonderfully tragic.

Framing a Scene

You have to frame just about every scene, so you're gonna be stumped from time to time. That's totally cool. No one should be looking to you as the magical font of ideas and light. If you're stumped:

- Look at the friendship questions, motifs, themes, and the plan (if there is one).

- Ask for help if you're stuck; your friends will help you.
- Ask whether anyone has a scene they want to see.
- Lay out the requirements of the scene and ask, "So how should we start this one?" or something like that.

Flags

Read the Youthful Offenders' Permanent Records over and over again throughout the game. Make your Authority Figures to address the YOs' traits. You've got someone who's Abused, Thrills, and Fast? Give her a big, slow, cruel chick to fight. Have to decide what The Authority is trying to do right now? Review its traits, and its Need.

Furthermore, make sure the other players know what one another's traits are and encourage them to play up to one another's strengths.

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Coming August 2008



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John Harper

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my socks."
Ben Lehman

"It's a game of
chivalry and beauty,
a game of the tragedy
of a collapsing
civilization"
Joshua A.C. Newman

website: www.browserbeware.com

blog: wundergeek.blogspot.com

Optional Rules

There are a bunch of rules in this game, and while I'd encourage you to play the game as written through for at least one series, you might want to try fucking with them a bit to make the game more fun for you. We call this drifting or hacking, and it's totally cool to do to a game. Here are some ideas I've had for hacks. Let me know how these work, and if you come up with some new ones I'd love to hear about them.

Sharing/Rotating Authority

So you took the Authority role at the start of the series. Maybe you want to be able to fight against it, too. If you're a YO, maybe you'd like to be the bad guy once in a while. If so, you can change the person who plays The Authority from session to session. There are two basic ways to go about this: rotating characters or sharing them.

Since rotating is the less-crazy version of this I'll start with that. It's pretty simple, really. In the session where you're playing The Authority, your YO isn't present. Make up a reason and roll with it.

It's important that each character get played in roughly the same number of episodes. Every conflict a character isn't in puts more stress on the others; you'll be constantly called upon to sell out your traits and this other freeloader isn't doing shit.

The crazier way to handle this is to mix up who's playing what character from episode to episode. Maybe you do it randomly, maybe there's a sequence.

Fucking with Traits

The trait system as constructed is a good balance: it gives you a strong framework in the closed

traits to help you build a character concept, but gives you room to author something unique and flavorful about your character with the open traits. There are a number of fun ways to screw around with this, though.

Closed-trait options: If you can think of other options that should be available to you for one of the closed traits, swap them out or add some. For example, let's say you thought Rich should be one of the choices for Means. What would its sold version be? Will it be a sixth choice for Means, or will you use it to replace Bad?

You might even think of rewriting entirely what one (or more) of the closed traits are. Think that Mistreatment should be replaced by Opportunity (so you've got Means, Motivation, and Opportunity)? Go for it. Come up with choices for free traits and their sold opposites.

Opening closed traits: Why don't you take this shit lying down? Why not write up why rather than picking from a list? Easy enough to do, though you lose some of the idea-framework goodness that you get out of closed traits.

Closing open traits: Want to define five different ways that people fight The Authority? Maybe everyone is a skatepunk, a hacker, a street thug, a social engineer, or a secret insider. Don't forget to come up with the sold versions of these traits, though.

Opening Authority Traits: Maybe The Authority's Vice isn't Sadism. Maybe it "Psychically Stores Pain Energies."

Setting Hack!

Look closely; *Misspent Youth* doesn't have to be a science-fiction game. A friend pointed out to me that you could totally play this game as teenage fighters in the American Revolutionary War. Fifties street gangs, pirates, mischievous anthropomorphic animals, whatever you want--I'm sure you can find a way to wrench the system into the shape you want.

If you go this way, you want to come up with a motifs list that addresses the genre you're going with. Also, think about what "selling out" means. It might be straight, easy, and obvious, but the genre you chose might not lend itself so easily to simply selling out or being free.

INSPIRATIONS &

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Influences

Here are some games that had a big impact on me in designing *Misspent Youth*.

Dogs in the Vineyard by Vincent Baker and *FATE 3.0* by Evil Hat played a big part in open traits. Dogs gave me the idea, and FATE helped me figure out how to write punchy ones. Dogs also gave me the idea of how to implement conflict resolution on the meta-scale (intents), yet to allow for resolution that felt a little tasky and had some back-and-forth to it.

The World of Darkness games by White Wolf were the inspiration for having three “splats” in the closed traits. I spent many a year playing these games and the framework that three choices of five possibilities each can give you is really powerful.

Because of the lifepaths in *Burning Wheel* by Luke Crane, I tried to structure the closed traits for the Youthful Offenders and The Authority in chronological/developmental order. If you squint and tilt your head sideways, you can see that.

The Shadow of Yesterday by Clinton R. Nixon taught me that if you construct the system such that players can succeed if they push hard enough, it makes the game kick fucking ass.

It was a dissatisfying game of *Cybergeneration* by Firestorm Ink that lead me to want to design *Misspent Youth* in the first place. While the system didn't work for me, I was captivated by the idea of a game where the juvenile shit-talking you do with your friends around the table would be non-anachronistic and thematically appropriate.

My Life with Master by Paul Czege gave me the wonderful idea of group creation of the antagonist. It's such a great idea that I have, on several occasions, forgotten it came out of his game and credited myself with this as an innovation in *Misspent Youth*. My impetus to have a structured endgame might've come from this game as well.

People

These people deserve thanks and more for helping me, pushing me, and giving me shit when I needed it.

Judd Karlman for introducing me to hippy games, for being my oldest friend, and for coming up with the idea of selling out traits at a Dreamation designers' roundtable.

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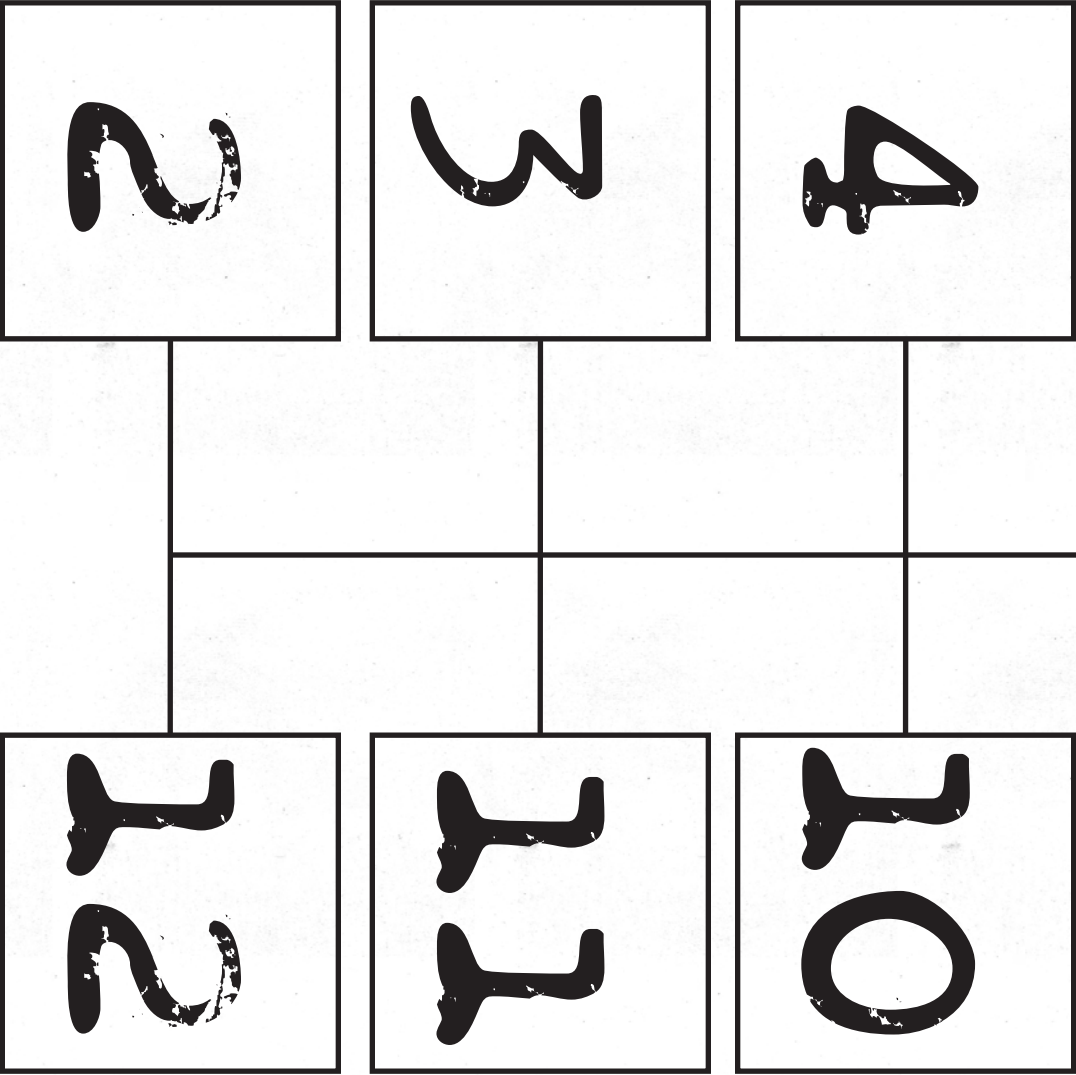
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TRAITS		
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Mistreatment		
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Means		
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		(Sold)
Glitch ▶		(Free)
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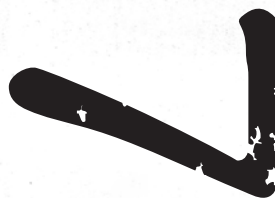
Activities Surveiled

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Conflict Resolution Map



Unthinking respect for Authority
is the greatest enemy of truth.
-- Albert Einstein

No future for you!
-- The Sex Pistols

Misspent YOUTH

Teenage rebellion in a fucked-up future

There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part, you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop! And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all! -- Mario Savio

I like it when a flower or
a little tuft of grass grows
through a crack in the concrete.
It's so fuckin' heroic.
-- George Carlin



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