Drama, instead of telling us the whole of a man's life, must place him in such a situation, tie such a knot, that when it is untied, the whole man is visible.

– Leo Tolstoy

the World of Darkness

A Guide to the Storytelling Adventure System

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Check out White Wolf online at http://www.white-wolf.com | Check out the Storytelling Adventure System online at http://www.white-wolf.com/sas

> **"Drama is based on the Mistake. I think someone is my friend when he really is my enemy, that I am free to marry a woman when in fact she is my mother, that this person is a chambermaid when it is a young nobleman in disguise, that this well-dressed young man is rich when he is really a penniless adventurer, or that if I do this such and such a result will follow when in fact it results in something very different. All good drama has two movements, first the making of the mistake, then the discovery that it was a mistake.**
>
> **– W.H. Aulden**

How to Use a Storytelling Adventure System Story

Think of an Storytelling Adventure System (SAS) product as a story kit, as if you'd bought a piece of modern furniture and brought it home in a big flat box. Inside, you'll find all the parts you need to build a story at home, through play. The tools you need to put this story together are in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** and its supplements. When you get your troupe together, you'll use all these parts to build something together. It might not look quite the picture on the box, but that's fine. Your troupe doesn't get together to look at a story, it gets together to build one.

So the SAS story is a nuts-and-bolts thing. The parts in each kit are designed to make the actual job of being a Storyteller easier, to make the craft of Storytelling fast and fun for you. The heavy artful majesty you've read about — the transcendent game experiences that shock and satisfy as well as any novel — those come simply from doing a great job. Everything in an SAS adventure is intended to take up the slack so you can focus on doing that great job.

The basic parts that make up most SAS stories are simple: Storyteller characters and scenes. Each of them can be used in different ways to keep the story building towards its climactic end.

Characters

The Storyteller characters presented for most SAS stories use the same format and rules as those in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, with a few elaborations and expansions. The archetypal characters you find in the main rulebook are intended to be used again and again, whenever you need someone like them in your story. The characters in an SAS product contain special advice and notes to help you use them in this specific story. You'll find sample descriptions, monologues, tactics and goals for the most important Storyteller characters in the story. Draw from them during play as needed.

Scenes

The scenes that make up the story follow a format you won't find in the main rulebook. Each scene is built as a discrete game encounter (or a collection of game encounters) for the players to play through. As the players take their characters through these scenes, a story naturally unfolds.

The scenes in most SAS prodycts are a mix of two types:

Encounters are scenes that occur when the characters initiate them — they encounter the murderous vampire when they enter the abandoned church, for example.

Events are scenes that occur when criteria specific to the story's timeline or dramatic arc are met — which is a dry way of saying "whenever the scene says it happens." One event, for example, happens when the characters successfully notice they're being watched, the next happens when the story reaches midnight in the World of Darkness, and another happens whenever you think the story needs a quick dose of violence.

Pacing and plotting scenes, whether in advance or on the fly, is part of the fun of being a Storyteller — for some people. If it's fun for you, take these scenes apart and use them however you like, maybe even importing scenes from other stories or creating new scenes for yourself. If that sounds like a hassle, and you'd rather focus in on the visceral, in-the-moment details of Storytelling, you'll find and example of the scenes already plotted for you in each story's "Treatment" section.

What's A Treatment?

treatment: *n.* In Hollywood parlance, a treatment is a short prose description of a movie's story, written before production begins. A treatment describes all the major dramatic "beats" of the story and sometimes includes directorial or developmental information, too (i.e., it doesn't necessarily restrict itself to relating the story).

In Storytelling terms, the treatment is the Storyteller's core overview of the story, from authorial notes on subtext all the way to frank narrative tips. Nothing is implied in a Storytelling treatment; this is where the author breaks it all down in brief for the Storyteller at home.

Reading The Story

There is no story. Not yet. What you have in an SAS product is a collection of situations and settings that describe the general plot a story could follow, but the story doesn't really exist until you and your players tell it.

While you're reading the product, you'll infer a story — or several stories — from the scenes and characters within. That story you read is just one possible story, which can serve as a guide for you to follow when you get together with your troupe to play. The story you all tell together around the game table is another story, with no obligation to imitate the story you imagined when you read the guide or the story we imagined when we wrote it.

Though most SAS products are broken down into acts, which have an important and intuitive order to them, the scenes within do not have to occur in exactly the order you read them. This is another way that the story you read here may be different from the story you tell around the table. The acts occur in order almost naturally, from the beginning through the middle to the end, but the order and the outcome of each scene depends on the choices your players make.

Watch out for the assumptions you make when reading an SAS product. Each of those assumptions is one way your players might interpret the story, too. But don't hold the players to any preconceptions you make about the story they'll play.

Remember that each SAS product is a blueprint, and blueprints aren't subtle. Although you should imply, hint and allude when you tell your story, it's not in your best interest for us to be coy when talking about the story. You get an insider's look at what the story is. Blueprints should be clear.

Don't be put off by the functional voice of this guide. Don't let it spoil the mood. This is a behind-the-scenes look at the stories you're going to get to enjoy for real later on, when you play. Be sure not to let this tone seep into your story when you tell it. You'll find plenty of ways to maintain the mood in every scene. Use them.

Reflecting on these complex relationships between reader and story, fiction and life, can constitute a form of therapy against the sleep of reason, which generates monsters.

– Umberto Eco

Reflecting on these complex relationships between reader and story, fiction and life, can constitute a form of therapy against the sleep of reason, which generates monsters.

Telling The Story

Stories are about characters making important decisions. Games are about players making important decisions. Storytelling games are about both.

If you want your story to be truly meaningful when you and your troupe tell it, the players must be given a chance to make meaningful decisions. Making a blind choice between two unmarked doors isn't interesting. It's not fun, and it's certainly not dramatic. Clarity is vital to good gameplay. Players need information for a decision to be important. Knowing that the reek of rot coming from behind one of those unmarked doors might be from the corpse of your dead brother makes the decision more interesting.

Deciding how to confront an enemy or accomplish a goal is fun, because something clearly meaningful is at stake. It might be justice, money, a family's safety or a friend's honor — it might be anything. When the consequences of the players' decisions are known, at least to some degree, choices become more interesting, more dramatic. If the antagonist isn't dissuaded (or caught, or killed, or whatever), then that family is still in danger, or the money is lost, or a friend goes unavenged. Something is at stake.

A World of Darkness story isn't just about making choices, though. It's about making difficult choices and living with the consequences.

So what is a difficult decision? In short, a dilemma: A choice between two equally unwelcome outcomes. You only have time to save one of your brothers, who do you choose? Would you kill someone yourself to prevent your child from becoming a murderer? Would you risk jail to stop a supernatural force that you're not absolutely sure is real?

Tough choices can be put before players or their characters. It may not matter much to the player whether or not an imaginary grandmother gets hit by a bus, but it should matter a great deal to her character. (If you do a good job of bringing the character of that grandmother to life, though, it'll matter to both the player and her character.)

For example, a character can be confronted with the choice between stealing or going hungry. This decision might not be too difficult for a starving character, but at the same time the player can be confronted with the choice of risking some damage to the character in exchange for fulfilling his Virtue of Fortitude. A player might not be interested solely in thinking like her character, after all, but also to contributing to the themes of the story. In this case, for example, she might choose to have her character steal just to play up the theme of desperation being evoked at the table that night.

It is absolutely fair game to use game mechanics to make tough choices real for the player. This is built into the Morality mechanism. A player may have no problem with imaginary arson, for example, without the risk of a substantial personal consequence, like a derangement. (Not to mention police action.) One of the easiest ways to do this is with bonus or penalty dice to actions that follow as the consequences of a tough choice later on. Think about it: this is the kind of tough choice a player is making when she's deciding what items her character brings with him. The motorist, stranded on the side of the road in a freakish rain, can only carry so many items on the hike back to civilization; does she choose the rifle (and its Damage dice) or the flashlight (and its equipment bonus)?

Not every challenge should necessarily be reduced to an either/or dilemma, of course. Deadlines, for example, automatically create situations in which decisions become important because every choice uses up the precious resource of time, but the actions a character can take between the start of the countdown and the end aren't limited to binary choices. Any limited resource can be used to lend weight to any situation, to make any choice into a tough choice. The police will be here in two minutes, what do you do with the body? You can only go four or five more miles before the car runs out of gas, where do you go? There are ten bullets and twelve zombies in the house, how do you survive the night?

While you're telling this story with your troupe, remember the Storyteller's mantra:

Difficult choices make drama.

Strive to confront the players with at least one meaningful decision to make every thirty minutes.

The Cardinal Sins of Storytelling

1. Boredom
2. Confusion

1. Boredom Is Poison. If players are bored, the story will die. If the story dies, the chronicle is likely to wither and perish, too. "But it's essential for the slow build!" or "But it makes the pacing more dramatic!" are not excuses for boredom. Don't kill the story for the sake of pretending to legitimize it — that's crazy. Remembering, if it's boring, it's not suspense. You know how you can tell? Suspense isn't boring.

Raymond Chandler said, "When in doubt, have two men come through the door with guns in their hands." If it was good enough for Chandler, it's good enough for us, too.

2. Confusion Kills Fun. Being mystified isn't the same as being confused. A puzzle or a riddle can be fun because you're not sure how to solve it, but that's not the same as being confused about just what the hell to do with it.

You know what to do with a puzzle: you put it together. You know what to do with a riddle: you look it up in a book and then tell people you figured it out on your own. Or whatever. The point is, once you're no longer sure what you're supposed to be doing, your fun begins to erode.

Clarity in every scene is important, whether that clarity comes from the big picture ("We have to get out of this room before midnight so we can save Daphne!") or the little picture ("We have to break down this door so we can get out of this room!").

Raymond Chandler's gunmen trick is also a viable trick to avoid *momentary* confusion in a Storytelling game: when two guys with guns bust into the room to kill the PCs, confusion is dispelled. The players now know, "We have to stop these guys so we can live!"

Cheap Tricks: We're not above cheap tricks and neither are you, the Storyteller. Just because you think a cheap physical conflict is weak plotting doesn't mean it isn't fair play in the game. Players come to be entertained in the hours they sit at the table. They shouldn't have to wait around for the end of the second act to get a dose of excitement just because you resent Hollywood action tropes.

If you, the Storyteller, are out there in a bind, facing a lethal dose of boredom, get the story back in motion if you have to use duct tape and a mallet to get the drama back into shape.

Musings on the SAS

When we released the first SAS products — **Chicago Workings, Parlor Games** and **The Resurrectionists** — we immediately sought out feedback and questions from fans and customers. And, of course, the fastest way to do that was to tour some internet forums. In the course of that electronic tour, and answering questions, we put some of the ideas behind the SAS into frank, conversational writing that we thought was worth sharing with you here.

What follows are some of the musings we shared online, and just a couple of the questions we answered from fans and customers. We'd like to thank everyone who took the time to gab with us online, and everyone who asked us the really provocative questions.

Enjoy.

Developer Notes on the SAS

"Storytelling is a skill, which means you can get better at it."

by Will Hindmarch, Storytelling Adventure System Co-Developer and Vampire: The Requiem Developer

About flexibility and adaptability...

Flexibility and adaptability, without sacrificing quality color text and mechanical systems worthy of quoting and reappropriating in your own home stories, is what our scene-based structure is all about. The regular, but versatile, format of the scenes is meant to make it as easy as possible for you to jettison one part of a story without a bunch of other stuff unraveling. Even better, you can add in other scenes from other stories to easily dial-up the amount of investigation or action (or whatever else) in your stories.

It's what we're essentially all doing when we adapt published adventures for our own games anyway, right? We're trying to scratch out the stuff we don't want and squeeze in our own stuff, whether we do it before play or in the thick of the game. I'm just trying to create some common language for how we do it. We want to systematize it so the process is easier to talk about and easier to share.

This ties into the community building idea. Community building is another one of the big goals of these new adventures, and one of my particular missions. This common language makes it that much easier to talk about how you ran an adventure, or how you're thinking about running it.

To use an example from **Chicago Workings**, you might move the foot-chase scene elsewhere, or basically run it twice if the characters have multiple encounters with the, uh, perpetrators in that scene. (I say, trying to avoid spoilers.) I might cut that scene out entirely.

We could compare notes, share advice and appreciate each other's "this is how my story turned out" anecdotes by comparing the flow of scenes (and substituting scene names for the shorthands here):

"When I ran Parlor Games, it ended up going…

Scenes A > B > E > F > C

…then I tossed in scene G from this other adventure, and ended with a climactic scene of my own design."

"What scene is that?" I ask.

And then you show me the scene, already sketched out in a format I can understand and plug right into my own games if I want. Scenes become a shareable commodity. Constructing stories and telling stories not only get recognized as being different skills, but as being skills at all, rather than raw talent.

In the writer's bible for the SAS, this idea gets mentioned more than once. It's my mantra: "Storytelling is a skill, which means you can get better at it." I hope that these adventures will help new Storytellers get better at it, but I am *sure* that the peer review of multiple Storytellers comparing notes on stories that they can all reference *will* help us all become better Storytellers, whether we're newbies or veterans.

To get better, though, we need some common reference we can talk about. The SAS products provide that. The more people that play them and share their thoughts, the better everyone's stories will be and the more prepared you can be to tell that same story in play.

Q: What kind of "assumptions" and "preconceptions" are you anticipating? Could you give some examples? What does the guide do to discourage such assumptions?

A: The preconception that holds up most published adventures, and that I think interferes with the dynamic between a lot of Storytellers and players, is that of the "proper" story. The idea that a gaming group is supposed to achieve the proper telling of whatever tale the ST devised before play is, if you'll pardon the expression, bullshit.

The fact of storytelling hints at a fundamental human unease, hints at human imperfection. Where there is perfection there is no story to tell.
– Ben Okri

The story doesn't exist until you tell it. The villain dies if he dies, and escapes if he is allowed to escape. Players are not cast to fulfill the destinies laid out for them in a script.

The flowcharts and scene breakdowns we use are meant to not only make plotting easy to handle for Storytellers, but easy to revise on the fly in reaction to player choices. I'm a big believer that plots are dull, utilitarian tools. What people mean, so often, when they talk about "plot" is "story." They're not the same thing.

Thus, the adventures we're creating don't hinge on a series of escalating encounters leading, necessarily, to a boss battle. (That's certainly possible, as it is a reliable scheme for rising tension and a violent climax.) Rather, we try to make these stories hinge on tough choices -- the vital mechanism in all good gameplay, in my opinion. For example, I don't know how my adventure, **The Resurrectionists**, ends. The final scene gives the players a climactic choice to make, but there's no success/fail element there. Instead, it's about choice and consequence. Keeping adventures about choice and consequence facilitates player freedom.

What the story is about thematically — what moral, if any, it has — depends on what your players choose. The adventure format strives to create an environment and scenic structure that create a consistent atmosphere and raise thematic questions which will intuitively provoke more high-falutin' dramaturgial stuff like subtext. That is, many of the scenes presented in **The Resurrectionists** are, on some level, about assumptions of hostility and containing ugly situations, but whether it's a story about how assumptions and containment ruin us or make us lords depends on what happens when you play.

So, it's mostly about flexibility and creating a kind of storytelling structure that's easy to talk about, reorganize, share and expand.

My hope is that people will share new variations on our published stories by combining scenes from multiple adventures into compelling new adventures that we wouldn't have thought of ourselves. To help make that happen, you'll see more developments in the future about how the SAS leads into other community-building plans we've got on the drawing board.

Q: If you don't know how the story ends, how do you know where to end the SAS scenario?

A: It's a little bit tricky, but it's part of the secret of writing a great SAS story, rather than just a straight-up linear tale in which the author's vision of a particular climactic ending is the final goal.

The thing to know is this: What's the story about? Not in the high-falutin' sense of metaphor and symbolism, but what, if you were to tell a friend in one sentence, is it *about*? **The Resurrectionists** is about the race to find this notorious vampire buried somewhere in a rundown Victorian cemetery. **Chicago Workings** is about being caught in the middle of an old feud between two occult architects with mystic power. **Parlor Games** is about hunting a wicked monster to its lair and killing it.

We don't know quite *how* these stories will end in your hands, but we know where they end, because we know what the stories are about. **The Resurrectionists** ends when you find the notorious vampire (and decide what to do about it). **Chicago Workings** ends when the feud between the two ghosts is ended. **Parlor Games** ends when the monster is dead.

Knowing, at least roughly, where a story comes out is vital to making collaborative storytelling — between you, the Storyteller, and the other players — easy. It's important to know what's at stake and what victory or failure might look like. What're the characters shooting at? The story ends when they hit or miss.

Q: It's still a sequence of scenes with most of them in linear order, and stuff like that has been done before many, many times. It's "just" a normal scenario with the scenes decoupled a bit more than is perhaps usual.

A: That's right. It's not a huge jump from the classic flowchart style of design. The flexibility of, as you say, decoupling and reusing scenes has some pretty significant effects on gameplay, though. Also, I've never been very satisfied with the support given to flowchart-style adventures in the past. Boxes and lines alone are not enough tools to effectively describe the decision-making processes that both players and Storytellers can go through during play.

Plus, not all SAS stories are such classic flowcharts like **Parlor Games**. For example, **Chicago Workings** has a flowchart style structure in which the passage of time is not nearly so fixed as it typically is in a flowchart-adventure. Scenes happen *sometime* after each other, but not necessarily *immediately* after each other. That adventure could take place over months, with lots of intervening stories going on in the meantime.

In **The Resurrectionists**, we use a map in place of a flowchart (which is very nearly the same as old-school adventure design with monster encounters) but with a very simple flashback at the beginning and a play space that's not constrained in quite the same way as a traditional "dungeon." (Though it is constrained, it happens in a cemetery.)

Play spaces are a vital part of adventure design, obviously. It's like level design for video games. I think there's way too much polarity in paper RPG design right now — not everything is either railroading or fully open worlds, after all. In some scenarios, flying to Tokyo to research at a museum is fair game, but in others it's just disruptive. It's out of bounds. Some stories are about what happens in one cemetery in one night (**The Resurrectionists**), others are about finding out the truth behind a mystical gambling den, whatever it takes (**Parlor Games**).

No, these aren't big leaps in adventure design, but I do think they're valuable steps forward. Lots of Storytellers have been doing this stuff at home for years, I'm sure (I have). But it hasn't been given the cogent voice it needs. A lot of Storytellers design adventures by intuition, doing a lot of these things without really stepping back and examining their process.

To paraphrase the narrator in *Fight Club*, it's on the tip of everyone's tongue -- we're just trying to give it a name.

SAS Products for All White Wolf Games

Don't be fooled by this document — the Storytelling Adventure System will be used to present you with compelling stories for most every White Wolf Game Studio product line. Look for SAS stories for **Exalted** soon, and check out the first book of our newest game line, **Scion: Hero**, for the first SAS story about the newest children of the ancient gods.

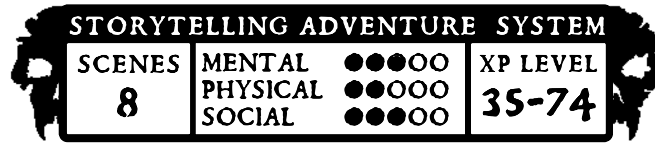
Learn more about the Storytelling Adventure System, and discuss your actual-play experiences with telling your own versions of these stories, on our SAS website:

www.white-wolf.com/sas

Storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it.
– Hannah Arendt

Adventure Ratings

A Storytelling Adventure System product has three ratings on its cover. They look something like this:



Scenes: This is simply the total number of scenes in the adventure. It's used to convey a rough sense of the length of the adventure (how long it will take to play). If there are eight scenes (even if two of them are optional), then the Scene rating is "8."

MPS (Mental, Physical, Social) dots: The adventure as a whole is given a rating based on how challenging it is in three categories: Mental (puzzles, mysteries, research), Physical (combat, endurance), and Social (interacting with/swaying others).

Also, each scene is rated with its own MPS scale. While the adventure as a whole might be rated M2, P3, S1, it's possible for one or two scenes to be rated S2 or S3, if one of the ways they can be "solved" is through a particularly challenging Social feat.

Each MPS rating uses the familiar range of 0 to 5 dots, according to the following scale:

o	No challenge (Involves no real risk, but may dramatic)
•	Minor challenge (Slight chance of lost Willpower or Blood)
••	Lesser Challenge (Low risk or mild consequences)
•••	Challenging (Even chances, moderate consequences)
••••	Major (Real risk or serious consequences for failure)
•••••	Extreme (Serious peril with lasting or lethal consequences)

XP Level: The amount of experience points that characters should ideally possess to play the adventure (but it's not necessary; they could be weaker or stronger). The scale is similar to the charts used for advanced character creation in each of the core books:

0-34	Beginner
35-74	Seasoned
75-119	Established
120-179	Veteran
180+	Legend

Format: In addition, the new format adds Scene Cards. These cards summarize each scene presented in the book with short notes, difficulty checks and other information to help keep the Storyteller organized and without having to constantly flip pages to reference the book.

On Screen or In Print

Finally, the layout is optimized so that when reading the material on screen there is no need to scroll around the pages. Each page takes up the entire viewing area on a standard monitor.

Each page is also arranged with just the amount of information you need for each scene. The landscape format makes the pages fit easily behind your Storyteller's screen. Print just the pages *you* decide *you'll* need during play. Check out the next page for an example of the scene cards you'll find in every SAS story.

Some SAS products also feature printable handouts, notes and props — hand-written notes, maps, clues — for use when you're telling your story. Depending on the kind of theatrics you're after, you could print these out on fancy papers or heavy cardstocks to give your players a tangible tool to help bring the game alive in their minds.

Storytelling is exploratory, not explanatory. A good story doesn't need extra preaching; it teaches its lessons skillfully and well all by itself. It does so by making us ask questions rather than giving us all the answers.

– David Sidwell

Scene Format

Overview: This is a big-picture look at the scene, including a synopsis and a short description of what triggers the scene (e.g. "Finding the homeless camp" or "Noticing Jeremiah's grave"). The central conflict in the scene is described here as well.

Description: Look here for a general description of the scene's atmosphere, setting and inherent game effects. The descriptive text in this section is usually suitable for reading aloud to the troupe, if you like.

Storyteller Goals and Tips: This entry looks at what this scene is designed to accomplish in the story (e.g., build suspense, exposit, challenge the characters physically) and what you, as the Storyteller, should keep in mind overall when running the scene. This is usually meta-game information, but not always: antagonist goals for the scene go here, too.

Character Goals: What are the players' characters trying to get out of this scene? Sometimes these goals will be obvious to the players and their characters at the outset (e.g., "find the Vault of Osiris" or "get Edgar to tell his story"), but sometimes not (e.g., "survive the zombie ambush"). The benefits of success and the consequences of failure are described here as well.

Actions: This sub-section gives concrete examples of how the scene's goals can be dramatized and played out using the game rules. Most scenes have a key action, which is a detailed description of the action, in rules terms, for you to use as you play the scene, complete with dice pools, modifiers and descriptive text.

Obstacles/Penalties: This section gives you multiple suitable ways to make the scene more challenging, more dangerous or more dramatic for the characters. Often, these have the secondary effect of making a scene longer. All are optional.

Aids/Bonuses: This section describes suitable ways the characters can make the scene easier for themselves, or extra benefits they can derive through clever play. Sometimes these have the secondary effect of making a scene shorter, but they just as often add more actions to the scene as the players strive to get these aids before attempting the key action. All are optional.

Details: Here you'll find samples of descriptive text to use throughout the scene. Unlike the text in the synopsis, above, these details are meant to be sprinkled throughout the scene, to maintain atmosphere and emphasize the mood of the story. For example, you may find details to use in the event of a particular exceptional success or a distinctive description to use when a monster is killed.

Consequences: When the outcome of the scene has special consequences, such as the bestowment of a temporary supernatural ability or a chance of later police investigation, this section describes the details. In a Chronicle Chapter story, like "Blood Red and Ash Gray," these are essentially story ideas for you to follow up on later, if you want.

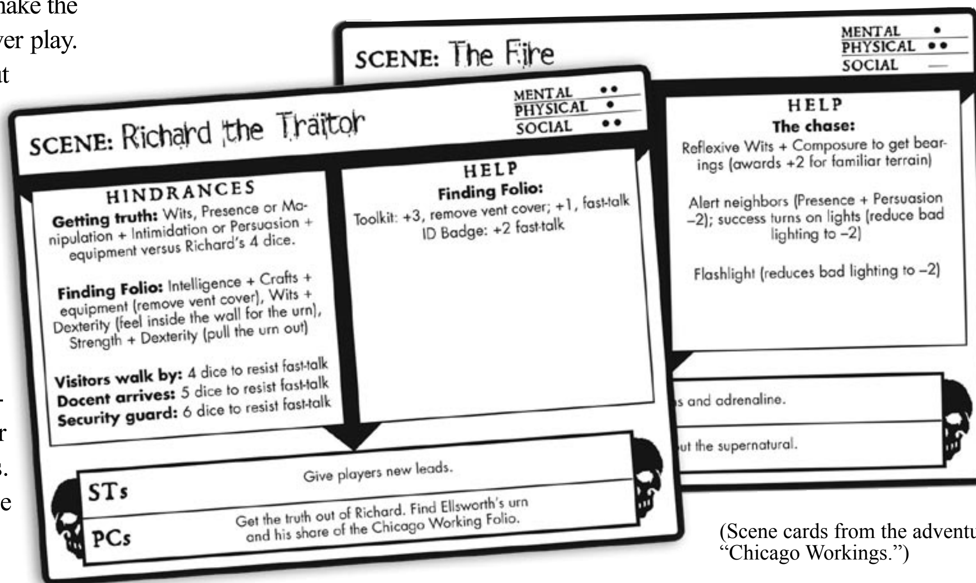
Adaptability

One of the hallmarks of the Storytelling System is its ease of use. Storytelling Adventure System stories are easy to adapt for troupes of players and characters more or less experienced than the XP rating might suggest. In general, any story can be scaled up or down about the equivalent of one "level" on the MPS and XP scales — for example, from •• to • or •••. Use the "Help" and "Hindrance" options on the scene cards to dial the challenge up or down. When in doubt, remember that the size of the dice pool is everything — add moody diec penalties like flickering lights, blowing rain, peeling linoleum underfoot and more capable enemies to create more perilous scenes.

The number of scenes is even more flexible; you can add or subtract scenes from other stories, or scenes you create yourself, until you get exactly the story you want.

Scene Cards

Every scene in the story gets it's own scene card. These are short-hand guides you print out, cut apart and keep on hand when you're playing out the story. You might even keep a few scene cards on hand from other stories — a fight scene, a Vice-themed scene, whatever — to toss into the current story, just in case.



(Scene cards from the adventure, "Chicago Workings.")

Plotting & Scene Flow

Plot isn't story.

The story is what happens. It includes all the subtext, the allusions, the metaphors, the morals inside the parables. Stories are what we've been telling each other since we, as a people, were young. Stories are why we learned to speak.

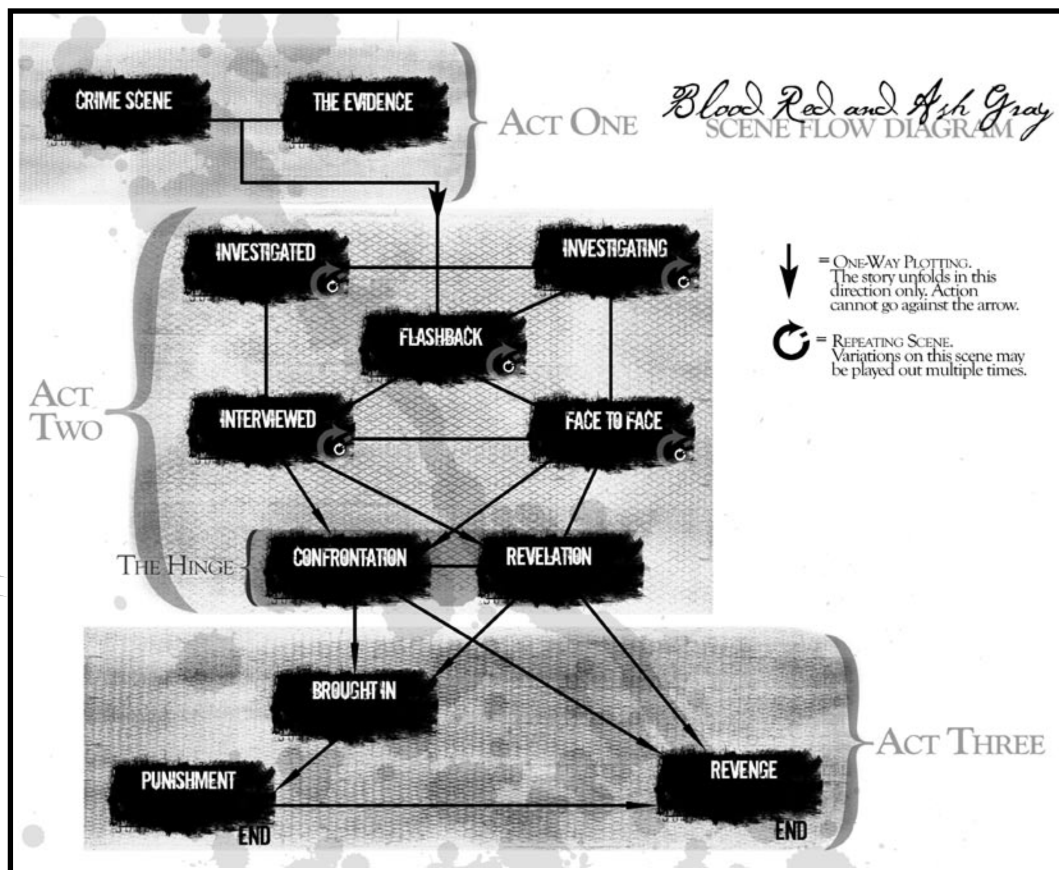
The plot is the order in which the story is related to the listener. Some stories occur in strict linear order, from the beginning, through the middle, to the end. Some plots jump forward or backward in time, with flashbacks revealing the character's troubled youth or the discovery of his wife's body, to explain or dramatize what's happening in the "now" of the story. Some plots jump sideways, from one story to another, from one character to another, until (maybe) the stories are wound together like strands into a cord. Some plots run exactly backwards.

The movie *Memento* is a terrific example of plot vs. story. *Memento* is made up of a series of scenes, like any movie, but they play out largely in reverse, punctuated now and again by flashes to another time, when the main character is on the phone, recalling the story. These scenes don't actually occur in reverse order for any of the characters — time flows straight ahead in the world for them, just as it normally does for us — it's just the *telling* of the story that toys with time. And *Memento* has a good reason for doing it; the main character's faulty memory informs the backward mechanism of the plot. A story with any other character wouldn't get the same mileage out of this style of storytelling.

> **A story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end... but not necessarily in that order.**
>
> **– Jean Luc Godard**

Plot is a part of storytelling, but is not strictly a part of the story itself. Although we don't know exactly what story you'll be telling or how you'll plot it — and neither will you! — until the scenario comes into contact with your troupe, having a general framework for the plot in mind when you begin is a good idea. This helps you improvise by giving you the sort of core melody of a plot you can riff on during play.

To the left is the scene flow diagram from the SAS story, **Blood Red and Ash Gray**. Most SAS stories include something like this. Looks complicated. Because of the possibilities inherent in a story that's *about* to be told, it *is* complicated. But in action, it's simple: play one scene, then another. In general, later scenes can't logically unfold until earlier scenes are played, but who are we to say what's possible in your stories and your World of Darkness? Follow your story where it takes you.



Examples in Action

The last couple of pages of this guide are sample parts of scenes from the SAS stories **Parlor Games** and **Chicago Workings**. We're always working on new SAS stories, and soon hope you'll be able to share your SAS stories with White Wolf players across the globe. Stay tuned to the SAS page on the White Wolf website for SAS news and releases:

www.white-wolf.com/sas

Scene: The Front Door

MENTAL ••	PHYSICAL ••	SOCIAL •••

Overview: This short scene takes place when the characters find the Ladybird Room and attempt to get inside.

Description: The door into the Ladybird Room is in an otherwise unremarkable alley.

The alley's brick walls are stained dark, though the smell of the city isn't as strong here. A thick metal door is set into the right wall toward the alley's end, watched over by a large, scraggly-bearded man in a dark suit with black turtleneck and opaque black sunglasses. He keeps his arms crossed as you approach. The door itself is unmarked.

Storyteller Goals: This mini-scene is meant to tease the players just a bit by hinting at what's on the other side of the door. It can also help you gauge how the players are going to approach the final leg of the hunt; if they tear the bouncer apart, you know violence is likely going to erupt sooner rather than later.

Character Goals: Simply to get inside. The level of subtlety by which the pack accomplishes this goal is up to them.

Actions: There are numerous ways to get past the guard (another Jack, an Azlu crawler in the skull of a human body) — distracting him, using social Skills to talk him into admitting the pack, or even killing him outright. If a character reveals herself as a werewolf in some way, the Jack tries to pound on the metal door four times, the code for "Wolves at the door!" This warns the other Azlu inside the Ladybird Room.

Talking Their Way In

Dice Pool: Presence/Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment versus Resolve + Composure (5 dice) + equipment

Action: Contested. If the character fails to convince the doorman, another character can try to rephrase the deal. Each attempt after the first grants the Jack a cumulative +1 bonus (maximum +5) on its dice pool.

Obstacles: Goes against strict orders (–2, default)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: *"You... you are not human."* [The Jack pounds on the door four times.]

Failure: *"I don't care. You can't come in. Go away."*

Success: *"I... I suppose that makes sense. Go on in."*

Exceptional Success: *"Oh! I... I must not have recognized you. I apologize! Please go in."*

Obstacles/Penalties: The Jack on guard duty is not particularly clever, but it's stubbornly loyal to Mr. G and has its orders not to let anyone in without the proper card or Mr. G's explicit permission. Players receive a –2 penalty to any attempts to persuade it to let them in. It cannot be bribed with money, having little use for that, and it cannot be seduced, having no sexual drive (much less a human one).

Aids/Bonuses: If the players have deduced that the playing card is a password and show an appropriate card (either that found on the body, or a card taken from one of the Jacks) to the doorman, they will be automatically admitted. The Jack on guard duty isn't savvy enough to detect that the characters are werewolves unless they do something obvious to give it away (such as showing up in Dalu form).

Details: The Jack on guard duty was once an outlaw biker before his "possession," and has a number of tattoos under its turtleneck. It owns only the clothing on its back.

The door looks like any other industrial-style metal door; it could be a warehouse or a kitchen or a sweatshop on the other side, for all you know. It's hinged to open outward.

Consequences: If the pack manages to get past the doorman without causing a ruckus, they have more freedom to roam the Ladybird Room without being recognized for what they are.

On the other hand, if they showed their hand too early (so to speak), Mr. G is forewarned, as are his enforcers. The pack will be marked as werewolves as soon as they enter, barring some unusual precaution (such as finding another group of patrons to enter first). If so warned, Mr. G will arm two of the Jacks with silver knives which he has kept tucked away for such an occasion, making them far more dangerous. (The silver knives are not already distributed because Mr. G hasn't actually had to deal with werewolves for years.)

The Gauntlet

The wall between worlds is very thick around the Ladybird Room. Although the place-that-isn't is a supernatural location, which normally implies a weaker Gauntlet, it is its own pocket realm with near-impenetrable walls. In addition, the Azlu in residence has spun its Gauntlet webs to keep unwanted pests from discovering its secret parlor. As a result, the Gauntlet imposes a –4 penalty to all appropriate rolls.

SCENE

Richard the Traitor

Mental •• Physical • Social ••

The characters come face to face with the man who may have sold out their friend and learn valuable information about what really happened that night.

Overview: The characters can come to this scene in search of Richard, or he can come to them. Richard is currently living in the basement apartment of a Bucktown church that's been converted to modern condominiums. A for-sale sign on the lawn for one of the condos features the gleaming white smile of one of Burgess's Agents.

Richard had a key to a safe-deposit box of Ellsworth's, which Richard was hoping would have something valuable in it. Instead it had a letter in Ellsworth's hand explaining his desire to be cremated and buried in a special, stone urn he hid in the walls of the former Chicago Public Library when Holabird & Root updated the site in 1991. Richard thought this sounded like more of Ellsworth's "holy geometric bullshit" and was just going to skip the details, but he saw something in his condo that has him freaked out and now he's interested in cooperating with the only other people who listened to Ellsworth's weird talk — the characters.

Whether the characters come to Richard or he comes to them, he still needs some cajoling before he becomes completely cooperative. He has nowhere else to go, though, so sooner or later he tells the characters what he knows. Exactly how the scene plays out is up to them. Richard may end up admitting what he knows in a wet-eyed whisper or he might cough it out through bloody-nosed sobs, depending on the characters' methods.

However it turns out, Richard begs the characters to see to it that Ellsworth gets buried like he wanted, "'cause you seem to understand that stuff." Richard has already received Ellsworth's ashes from the funeral home. He has them in the simple brown jar the crematorium supplied. He'll take the characters to the spot at the Cultural Center where he's sure the urn must be.

Storyteller Goals and Tips: Your goal with this scene is to give the players new leads and reward them (after the automatic tragedy of "The Fire") with the chance to choose Richard's comeuppance.

Character Goals: Get the truth out of Richard. Find Ellsworth's urn and his share of the Chicago Working Folio.

Actions

Social Action: Getting the Truth Out of Richard

Dice Pool: Wits, Presence or Manipulation + Intimidation or Persuasion + equipment versus 4 dice (representing Richard's desire to help but propensity to lie)

Action: Contested. Can be retried.

Ultimately, the characters will be successful. Dish out the following information as necessary to maintain the mood the players are showing you they want. The question is whether they do anything to Richard along the way that could get them charged with assault if they want to turn him into the police.

Success: *"I didn't know what was going to happen. Okay? I swear I didn't. I thought maybe they were gonna lift some of his antiques, steal a deed or something. I didn't think anyone was going to fucking kill the old guy! All I had to do was walk away and my days of sponging old men were over."*

"The guy who made me the deal was some real-estate agent, I think. I don't know anymore. He told me to call a number and tell them I wanted the caretaker job at the condo building on Walcott, and I did, and I got the job. But, man, listen: I don't know what is going on there, with those guys. I don't want to go back there, man. There are sounds in the storage area."

"The old man's note said he wanted his ashes to go into an urn he hid in the, ah, the library. When they made it the Cultural Center. I had to walk the old man down there a couple times. He had this spot he liked in the room with the big dome. Gotta be in there. They've got big-ass vents in there with fancy grills, and he used to always touch this one. Like for luck or something."

Action: Finding the Folio

Dice Pools: Intelligence + Crafts + equipment (remove vent cover), Wits + Dexterity (feel inside the wall for the urn), Strength + Dexterity (pull the urn out)

Action: Each is an instant action that takes two minutes and can be retried.

The vent in the Cultural Center where the urn is hidden is located in a large reception room at the top of a grand marble lobby off of Washington Street, near Millennium Park. It is a public area, but with no exhibits or events that day it is not a high-traffic area. Visitors come