



**HOLY
DIVER**



PROTOCOL

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Holy Diver is a custom game in the *Protocol* game series.

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HOLY DIVER

Holy Diver is a story roleplaying game homage to Ronnie James Dio. With characters and events drawn directly from the lyrics of Ronnie James Dio songs (from Rainbow, Black Sabbath, and his self-titled work), the game is a strange trip through the golden lyrics of the metal god himself. Specifically, the game is about fantasy adventurers on a quest to the Silver Mountain, to see ‘the Witch’.

The adventurers may never, never come home.

RONNIE JAMES DIO

Let’s face it. There’s plenty of great metal bands, but no one wrote myth quite like RJD. Don’t try to make sense of everything that happens in this game. Let the poetry of Ronnie’s words carry your adventures someplace ‘magical.’ This game is dedicated to his memory. Because ‘We Rock.’

PROTOCOL

Protocol is a series of story roleplaying games that thrusts characters into dramatic situations. Each game uses the same set of rules, with vastly different parameters, start-points, characters, and finales. Players take on the roles of directors outside the action and characters inside the action, using the ebb and flow of four different scene-framing styles (vignettes, interrogations, interludes, and ensembles) to tell meaningful stories about characters in crisis.

Each game in the Protocol series is zero-prep for 3 or more players. The game length is exponentially long, so games with more players take more time to complete. The Protocol Series requires a deck of poker cards as well as tokens to track drama points.

This series presumes some understanding of GMless game protocol: scene-framing, shared authority, and so on. If you’ve never played a GMless game, try one of the GMZero games such as *Dying Memories*, or *George’s Children*. A free pdf of game advice — GMZero Introduction Document — is available for download from drivethrurpg.com.

The Protocol series includes over 50 games using the core Protocol engine. Some elements of the game have changed since its first release. Those familiar with the original system should review the changes before beginning the game. There are also optional rules that can slow down set-up time and world building. Be mindful of this. And while the document is longer than before and the format is vertical, some elements have been streamlined. For instance, advanced roles and backgrounds have been eliminated, and roles have been simplified.

Some of the new Protocols have special rules. Be sure to read them carefully.

GETTING STARTED

In *Holy Diver*, players take on the roles of adventurers on a quest to find *the Witch*. In typical Dio fashion, the depth of poetry reaches farther than we can ever see. So, why we are ‘off to the witch’ is anyone’s guess. He’s left us these few words to piece together his meaning.

“I am wicked

I am legion

Strength in numbers, a lie

The number is one

All together

You’ll never

Be stronger than me”

- Select one role for your character — this has no mechanical benefit
- Name your character (a list of suggestions is on page 23)
- Determine a character's motivation by drawing one card
- Determine a relationship between two characters by drawing one card
- Determine elements about the game through world building

DECK SHUFFLING

A standard deck of cards is shuffled at the beginning of the game and again (only) if the deck runs out of cards. Used cards are discarded. Do not return cards drawn for Motivations or Relationships to the deck. The same goes for Scenes and Locations during play.

DRAMA POINTS

Each player starts the game with one drama point and only gains additional points during specific scenes. For players who want more authorial control before play, consider starting with two or three drama points each. See page 12 for more on using drama points.

ROLES

Roles provide flavor and context, but no mechanical benefit.

1. **The Breathless.** You are willing to learn, but also ready to burn.
2. **Captain at the Helm.** Protector of the realm, sail across the sea.
3. **Child of the Sea.** With the power to blind the sky, you are still lost. You can also sail across the sky.
4. **Dreamer.** Do your demons ever let you go?
5. **Fool.** Sometimes wise, but destined to sail away.
6. **Gypsy.** This is her first journey, but some are blinded by her light.
7. **Holy Outlaw.** “Everything that I see is for me.”
8. **Keeper of the Sign.** You’ve seen some creatures from hell and heard what they say.
9. **The King.** Just about to smoke and burn. But look out.
10. **Neon Knight.** Out of shadows, shining ever-bright.
11. **Star of the Masquerade.** No need to look so afraid, though.
12. **Virgin/Whore.** Give nothing. Take everything.
13. **The Wolf.** Does anyone believe you? Don’t let them hear you say any more.



MOTIVATIONS

Each player defines the motivation of his own character. Motivations are determined by drawing one random poker card from the deck for each character. The motivation descriptions are vague — specificity is your job. For instance, the ♠10 is a motivation of wishing well/star, impulsively. The player may define this motivation as believing against all logic that his or her wishes will always come true..

A list of motivations is on page 7.

MOTIVATIONS ARE NOT GOALS

Do not confuse motivations with needs or goals. The goal is defined by the story. What motivates a character is an extension of the character's role within the story. You can be motivated by pride to save another character from herself, but your goal cannot be pride.

A motivation may also be a hindrance as much as a benefit. Being confidently driven by your illness doesn't stop you from coughing at the wrong moment or help you keep up with everyone.

"THEY SAY THAT
LIFE'S A CAROUSEL
SPINNING FAST,
YOU'VE GOT TO RIDE IT WELL
THE WORLD IS FULL
OF KINGS AND QUEENS
WHO BLIND YOUR EYES
AND STEAL YOUR DREAMS"

- RONNIE JAMES DIO,
HEAVEN AND HELL

MOTIVATIONS

SUIT

- ♣ Compelled
- ♦ Cursed
- ♥ Foolishly
- ♠ Impulsively

VALUE

- A No More Running in a Circle
 - 2 Don't Dream or Close Your Eyes
 - 3 Can't Face the Light
 - 4 The Vision Never Dies
 - 5 Some Light Cannot be Seen
 - 6 Gotta Get Away
 - 7 Don't Close the Door
 - 8 Bringer of Evil
 - 9 Look for the Answer
 - 10 Wishing Well/Star
 - J Love Isn't Money
 - Q Lonely is the Word
 - K Living Out of (My) Time
- Joker
- Draw two and combine the results

EXPRESSING VALUES

Interpreting the motivations chart can be perplexing. What exactly does it mean to be motivated by Some Light Cannot be Seen? Cursed even? What does the character believe he can see that others cannot? As always, the values are prompts to spark the imagination. They are not delimiters. Character motivations are tied to the story goal of that particular Protocol. If you're struggling to figure out what your motivation means, ask around or spend one drama point to draw or pick something else.

RELATIONSHIPS

Each player selects one pair of characters to have a relationship. Relationships are determined by choosing (any) two characters and drawing one random poker card from the deck. The pair of characters share this relationship. The relationship descriptions are vague. Specificity is your job. For instance, the ♣10 is a relationship of family escaping loneliness. The players sharing this relationship may define it as being the last two remaining members of their people or staying together as family for fear of being alone.

A list of relationships is on page 9.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to add a third character to a relationship.

A player may **spend one additional drama point** to make a drawn relationship between a character and an NPC (see page 12).

Once play has started, any player may **spend one drama point** to create a relationship between two characters who have been in a scene together. No card is drawn for this relationship. It is defined by the context of the scene(s) already played.

DEFINING RELATIONSHIPS

Traditional roleplaying games assume relationships of adventurous intent. But good drama unfolds when two players can develop a relationship beyond always agreeing to 'chase the gold.' Let your relationships with others focus your gameplay and storytelling styles. But don't let it derail the story. No one wants to watch a movie where two people bicker for two hours (i.e. Bad Boys II).

RELATIONSHIPS

SUIT

- ♣ Family/Long-Term
- ♦ Friends/Rivals
- ♥ Romantic
- ♠ Community/Working

VALUE

- A Dreaming
- 2 Illusion
- 3 Mystery
- 4 Heaven and Hell
- 5 Wiseman/Fool
- 6 Black/White
- 7 Bleeding
- 8 Long Way to Nowhere
- 9 Sadness
- 10 Escaping Loneliness
- J Jesters
- Q Kings and Queens
- K Protectors
- Joker

Draw again, adding another character to the Relationship

EXPRESSING VALUES

Relationships between characters should be dynamic. They can be positive or negative, but they shouldn't be easy. The suits are always the same, but the values change from time to time, to reflect the setting. In most cases, it should be easy for two players to work out the details of their characters' relationship. However, there are instances when two players do not want their characters to be romantically involved or kin. The suits and values are prompts, not absolutes. Family could be in-laws. Romantic could be two characters who were once involved with (or chasing after) the same person. Community is as simple as knowing each other from around the neighborhood.

WORLD BUILDING

World Building is an important game stage. Players assume power over the environment that their characters are involved in. The characters may know some of this information already. Some of it becomes evident as the story progresses. Each player selects one ingredient from the list below. If you are playing a 3-player game, then each player selects two.

Now is a good time to determine why you seek the Witch.

1. **Why does the omen ‘don’t talk to strangers’ make you nervous?**
2. **Who among you can become invisible? Who then is the hero who cannot bleed?**
3. **[Legend states] The Witch is meant to help or heal. Is this true? Maybe she’s the enemy.**
4. **Some refer to the the Witch as Lady Evil. Why? Does she have another name?**
5. **Which of these verses of the Witch’s song is true? Never trust shadows? The lady takes your vision? She’s the queen of the night?**
6. **When did we lose the rising sun? How? Can it be regained?**
7. **Whose back is to the wall? Who chases the sun? Who lives for today? Who will never get old? Who screams for sanctuary?**
8. **Why must you look out for the King? Is he an agent of progress, or destruction?**
9. **Describe the angry machine and what makes it so contagious.**
10. **Name and describe the one who will blind your eyes and steal your dreams.**

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to answer one additional world building question (after everyone has answered one).

A player may **spend one drama point** to answer a question that has already been answered, offering additional insight that does not contradict what has already been said.

GAME PLAY

In the Protocol Series, players take turns directing scenes involving some or all of the characters. Directing a scene involves establishing parameters of game play, such as who, where, and when, some of which is provided for you. Scenes and location charts are on pages 20 and 21, while names appear on page 23.

Each turn the active player (director) draws two cards, which determine the scene type — vignette, interrogation, interlude, or ensemble — as well as the location. The scene’s type (suit) and atmosphere (value) are determined by the first card, while the location is determined by the second card. *For instance, the director draws a ♦7 and a ♣9 indicating an interrogation (♦) about the sky is falling at lightning/thunder (♣) the dark.*

Some players may find the location cards restrictive. You are free to ignore them or just invent a location if you so choose.

ADVICE

These ‘tags’ are designed to inspire the director to create scenes that link a complete narrative together. There is an ebb and flow here, trust me. It works. Listen to what has come before, pay attention to the cards you’ve drawn, and rely on your instincts.

OPTIONAL RULES

- If the same suit is drawn three times in a row for a scene or location, the director may discard the card and draw a new one until a new suit appears.
- At the beginning of the game, shuffle the deck and remove 10 cards at random. Do not look at them. Remove them from play and never shuffle them back into the deck.
- A player always has a minimum of one drama point to spend during the finale on his own character.
- Once per game, the players may **award one drama point** to a director who has framed a particularly good scene or a player who has contributed to a scene in a dramatic fashion.
- Select a permanent director who does not play a character, but instead runs the game like a traditional RPG. Cards are still drawn for scenes. The game lasts for a number of scenes equal to four times the number of players, or as long as the director chooses. During the finale, the director may spend up to four drama points in order to write vignettes about the other characters.

DRAMA POINTS

Drama points are used to control the narration and finale. In addition, players may use drama points in any way that breaks the rules. They are tools for dramatic escalation, interrupting the action, and general authoritative control. There are few rules for spending drama points, but some examples include:

- The director may **spend one drama point** to discard a scene/location card and draw a new one. If the card drawn is a scene card of the same suit OR value, the director may draw a new one at no cost (but only once).
- The director may **spend one drama point** to change the suit of a scene card to any other suit. The value may not change.
- If a scene ends with unresolved conflict, any player may **spend one drama point** to shift the conflict to an NPC who has already made an appearance in the story, or **spend two drama points** to shift the conflict to a new NPC.

Other examples appear elsewhere throughout this document.

NPCs

NPC is short-hand for Non-Player Character. These are characters who may appear during play, but that no one single player controls. A cop on the street, a bartender at a restaurant, or a cashier at the check-out line are all NPCs. Sometimes they are the background noise from the world and sometimes they interact with the characters the players control. How often they appear and how much they influence play is up to you.

Creating them for the game is easy. If you're the director, you can create one NPC during any (non-vignette) scene. Each scene type provides information on how NPCs are used in those scenes. When you are not the director, you can **spend one drama point** to create an NPC in a scene, following the same rules. Keeping track of NPCs should be done on a separate piece of paper or index card that is easily available to all the players.

Whoever adds the NPC to the scene plays that character in the scene.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to create a relationship between two NPCs by drawing a card from the deck and defining that relationship in detail.

A player may **spend one drama point** to take on the role of an NPC during a scene.

THE OPENING SCENE

The opening scene of the game is always a **vignette** (see page 14) that takes place at the start of the journey. The vignette focus is either The Sky is Falling or Mystery. Determine randomly which player narrates this vignette, but do not draw any cards.

Afterwards, take turns until every player has directed four scenes.

The director decides that Witch lives alone, at the end of the horizon (thematically, very Dio). As the group gathers, the Keeper of the Sign descends to the ground along a current of red electricity and a choir of sighs echos through the air. Across the midnight sky, meteors rocket and crash against the Silver Mountain. This is an ill omen to be sure.

ADVICE

The opening scene sets the proper tone. From here, the other players get a sense of where the story might lead. Pulling together as many world building threads as possible ensures that things won't be forgotten once the game is underway. The opening scene is about providing pathways to plot threads and not closing the door on ideas.

NPCs

The opening scene does not have dialogue, but any number of NPCs may color the story background. Since the opening scene can be about anything or anyone, this is an opportunity to show the 'audience' what is going on elsewhere in the story.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to add a minor detail or affectation to the opening scene, but he cannot contradict what was said by the director.

A player may **spend one drama point** to add a new NPC to the opening scene, adding a minor detail along with the new character.

VIGNETTES ♣

Vignettes involve no actual dialog. They merely set the atmosphere for the story. The director determines the location from the card drawn and narrates a brief scene. A vignette shouldn't take more than a minute or two to narrate.

After narrating a vignette, the director **gains one drama point**.

The director draws a ♣10 for scene — Vignette about Stand Up and Shout/Mob Rules — and a ♦Q — Night/Rainbow Witches' Valley.

"We had reached what we hoped was Witches' Valley, a strange rainbow cutting through the sky. But before we could get our bearings, our retainers decried our decision to come here, claiming the darkness itself must be fed. We didn't know which to fear more. The rumors or the help."

ADVICE

Keep your vignettes short and simple. Narrate enough information to set the tone, but don't overdo it by dragging the action on too long. Concise sentences are a storyteller's best friend.

Vignettes are a good opportunity to show what else is going on in the story that does not involve the main characters. They can highlight a single event, resolve a crisis from another scene, or set up future tension. No one can interrupt a vignette, so explore the game space as much as you like.

NPCS

Vignettes do not have dialogue, but any number of NPCs may color the story background. Since vignettes can be about anything or anyone, this is an opportunity to show the 'audience' what is going on elsewhere in the story.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to add a minor detail or affectation to a vignette, but he cannot contradict what was said by the director.

A player may **spend one drama point** to add a new NPC to a vignette.

INTERROGATIONS ♦

Interrogations are a complicated but varied approach to scene-framing. There are a number of ways to direct an interrogation scene, but the core concept is that the director asks up to five questions to another player.

METHOD ONE

The director selects one player, steals one drama point from that player, and asks that player up to five questions.

METHOD TWO

The director selects one player. That player takes on the role of an NPC of the director's choosing. The director then asks that player up to five questions.

The director may ask the questions from the point of view of an NPC or his own character. This process should feel organic. However, the interrogation may be out of character as well, in which case the director asks the questions in an abstract fashion, as though going down a list. Regardless, the questions can be anything fitting the theme of the card drawn.

The player being interrogated cannot say *no*, nor can the player avoid answering the question. If a leading question paints the player into a corner, all the better.

The director draws a ♦4 for scene — Interrogation about Two Eyes from the East — and a ♠7 — Silver Linings (Disappear) Edge of the World.

The director decides that Saxon and Exeter have taken watch (looking East) while the rest of the group sleeps. In the night, they tell each other stories and drink away the group's whiskey. After a few hours, Exeter interrupts to ask Saxon what she thinks they will find when they reach the edge of the world. Will they fall off? Or will there be silver linings?

ADVICE

Ask leading questions. Avoid yes/no questions, or questions that can be reduced to short answers. What and why questions are great. Did or can questions are not. "Why are you waiting for reinforcements?"

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

The director may **give one drama point** to another player to have that player interrogate the director.

The director may **spend one drama point** to ask one additional question during the interrogation.

A player being interrogated may **spend one drama point** to avoid answering one question.

INTERLUDES ♥

Interludes involve two (and only two) characters with a pre-existing relationship, but neither character needs to be the director's. The director sets the scene based on the cards drawn. The scene runs as long as the director likes, without being self-indulgent — calling “scene” when the characters have said or done enough. An interlude involves only one location. Should the characters leave the location (or reach a moment of conflict), the scene ends.

All players **not** involved in the scene **gain one drama point** at the end of the interlude.

The director has drawn the ♥5 for scene — Interlude about Dreams of Ashes — and the ♣8 for location — Lightning/Thunder Buildings of Glass.

The director decides that Saxon and Exeter have awoken in the middle of the night to the same dream. As lightning and thunder crash outside, they are reminded of their dream where glass buildings crumble into ash. The two cannot fall asleep and take a moment to talk about what they've both seen.

ADVICE

Interludes are mostly about the drama between two characters. While interludes can be used to advance the plot, this is secondary to the interpersonal actions and reactions of the characters. Let them explore their relationship in the context of the scene's focus.

NPCS

Typically, there are no NPCs in an interlude, unless someone **spends one drama point** to include one.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

The director may **spend one drama point** to place two characters into an interlude who do not have a pre-existing relationship.

The director may **spend one drama point** to add an NPC to an interlude.

A player may **spend one drama point** to join an interlude.

A player may **spend two drama points** to join an interlude as an NPC.

A player may **spend one drama point** to end the interlude early or to extend the interlude after the director has ended it.

ENSEMBLES ♠

Ensembles involve all of the characters. Like an interlude, the director determines the focus of the scene, as well as the location. The director may preempt the scene as much as he likes, but once the ensemble starts, the players should let things develop organically. The director still has the right to call “scene” at any moment, but any player may override the director by spending one drama point to end a scene early, or to extend a scene longer.

The director may take on the role of an NPC in the ensemble, instead of his own character. Any player may **spend one drama point** to take on the role of an established NPC instead of his own character.

The director has drawn the ♠3 for scene — Ensemble about the Hand that Writes — and the ♥6 for location — Storm on the Edge of the Sky Golden Sea of Lights.

The director decides the group has reached a sage on the edge of the Golden Sea of Lights that they've sought for some time. A storm rages on the horizon as the characters ask questions of the sage, played by the director in this scene.

ADVICE

Ensembles involve everyone and should be allowed to run their course. But not too long. Eventually the characters will start spewing every kind of theory and idea, which slows play and distracts from the story.

Let everyone get a say, but once you resolve the scene's primary focus, it's time to end things. Don't forget, if there's conflict, the scene ends on its own, unless someone **spends one drama point**.

Reward ingenious ideas and know when it's time to cut the action.

DRAMA POINT EXAMPLES

A player may **spend one drama point** to end the ensemble early or to extend the ensemble after the director has ended it.

A player may **spend one drama point** to take on the role of an NPC in the ensemble.

FLASHBACKS (JOKER)

Flashbacks are interlude or ensemble scenes from the past, before the story began. The director determines the focus of the scene, as well as the location. The director may preempt the scene as much as he likes, but once the flashback begins, the players should let things develop organically. The director still has the right to call “scene” at any moment, but any player may override the director by spending one drama point to end a scene early, or to extend a scene longer.

ADVICE

Flashbacks are not there to fill in the gaps of the story we already know. A good flashback takes us to a time and place we didn't expect. It should add a twist we didn't see coming.

MONOLOGUES (JOKER)

Monologues are solo scenes where the director's character (or an NPC) delivers a single speech that cannot be interrupted. The director decides who else is at the location at the time the speech is delivered.

The director **gains one drama point** at the end of the monologue.



RESOLVING CONFLICT

INTERLUDES

Whenever two characters in an interlude reach a moment of unresolvable conflict, the director narrates the conclusion and ends the scene. Should a player wish to override this, he must **spend one drama point** in order to narrate the conclusion. In the case of a tie where more than one player spends drama points, one player must spend more drama points than anyone else in order to narrate the conclusion.

ENSEMBLES

Whenever two (or more) characters in an ensemble reach a moment of unresolvable conflict, the scene ends, which leaves the conflict dangling. Should a player wish to override this, he must **spend one drama point** in order to narrate the conclusion. In the case of a tie where more than one player spends drama points, one player must spend more drama points than anyone else in order to narrate the conclusion.

ADVICE

Should a scene end unresolved, this creates a cliffhanger effect. Players may wish to resolve this in the following scene. But this isn't always necessary. Use your best judgement. Sometimes the best things are left unsaid.

OPTIONAL RULES

Players who are used to adventure games with clear cut conflict resolution may not like the simplicity of drama points resolving conflict. If all the players agree, conflict should be resolved by a card draw (from a separate deck), with players able to spend drama points to draw additional cards — high card wins and ties remain unresolved.

SCENES

SUIT

- ♣ Vignette
- ♦ Interrogation
- ♥ Interlude
- ♠ Ensemble

VALUE

- A Demons (Letting Go)
- 2 (Cry for the) Magic
- 3 The Hand that Writes
- 4 Two Eyes from the East
- 5 Dreams of Ashes
- 6 The Chains are On
- 7 The Sky is Falling
- 8 Whispers (Her Name)
- 9 Dream Evil/Evil Eyes
- 10 Stand Up and Shout/Mob Rules
- J Mystery
- Q A Fire and a Spark
- K Hungry for Heaven
- Joker
- Flashback or Monologue

EXPRESSING VALUES

One of the changes in Protocol (from the original system) is the way in which scene values are defined. Previously, a large and abstract, thematic term would be used (i.e Fear, Despair, Chaos) to express the focus of the scene. In this edition, the values of the scenes have a more poetic and evocative style. The intent is trigger different kinds of ideas, while shaping richer stories. I hope you find it effective.

LOCATIONS

SUIT

- ♣ Lightning/Thunder
- ♦ Night/Rainbow
- ♥ Storm on the Edge of the Sky
- ♠ Silver Linings (Disappear)

VALUE

- A Midnight Sea
- 2 The Never Ending Wheel
- 3 Chalice of the Soul
- 4 Carousel/The City
- 5 Land of No Tomorrow
- 6 Golden Sea of Lights
- 7 Edge of the World
- 8 Buildings of Glass
- 9 The Dark
- 10 Queen Street
- J The Southern Cross
- Q Witches' Valley
- K Silver Mountain
- Joker
- Egypt

LOCATIONS 101

Some Protocols put the characters on the move constantly, while other Protocols have characters staying in relatively the same place for the duration of the story. The location chart is therefore explored in one of two ways. Either the location is the Suit or Value of the card, and the modifier to the location is the other. For instance, in Holy Diver, the value of the card indicates the location and the suit of the card adds an affectation to the location that may or may not affect the plot.

FINALE

Players take turns directing scenes. However, the order is not important. Players may decide to take turns in a random order, clockwise order, or even bid to be the next director. Just make sure everyone is involved and no one directs two times in a row.

The person directing the final scene of the game is not responsible for wrapping up loose plot ends. In fact, doing so robs the other players of their agency. Scene 16 is no more important than 8.

Once everyone has directed four scenes, the finale begins. The player with the most drama points (or the person who directed the final scene of the game, in case of a tie) narrates the first vignette of the finale. Draw one card to determine the finale's focus. If the joker is drawn, draw again, amplifying the issue. Use of the card is optional and should not replace common sense. After that, these vignettes can be played in any order and the order of events can be fluid/plastic.

SUIT

- ♣ The Carousel is thrown to the ground
- ♦ The Circle is broken
- ♥ Nobody bleeds for the dancer
- ♠ You've been left on your own...

For each drama point a player still possesses, he narrates (in turn) a vignette about his character's fate and/or the fate of the others (including NPCs) in relation to the story. **A player may not spend more than one drama point affecting a single character other than his own.**

RANDOM FINALE

Not all roads lead to the same conclusion and sometimes the journey is more important than the destination. Glib inspirational poster pabulum aside, the way players play the game may lead to a finale where the card draw makes no sense. While I've done my best to make the suits associated with the finale as wide as possible to accommodate the story, it may be necessary to just ignore the card draw and play without it.

NAMES

CHARACTERS

Ace	Agamemnon
Ash	Avalon
Axel	Beretta
Bishop	Blaze
Blood	Cash
Cinder	Crow
Dagger	Damien
Delora	Diesel
Doro	Draven
Elsinore	Exeter
Faust	Ghost
Giger	Grendal
Gunner	Harley
Jackdaw	Jett
Jezebel	King
Lang	Luna
Malichi	Maven
Mercy	Merlin
Mist	Moon
Morrigan	Nimue
Oleander	Ophelia
Orchid	Osiris
Paine	Penance
Rose	Ryche
Ryder	Samuel
Saxon	Sebastian
Severin	Shade
Solomon	Song
Steele	Strom
Talon	Vesper
Vladimir	Winter
Wolf	Zane

ADVICE

Running good Protocol games is not difficult. In fact, if you just pay attention to the game around you, it becomes very easy. The most important rule to remember is that there is nothing here to win. This is a game that starts, plays, and resolves in less than three hours. There is no value in a character living or dying, winning or losing, succeeding or failing. The value is in how these events impact the story.

Imagine an axis. Upon that axis is *win* on one side and *lose* on the other. This axis would be familiar to 99% of the world who believe that game design started and ended with *Monopoly*. For people who've played traditional roleplaying games, the end points are not win-lose, but are based upon perceived wants. Are the characters in it for treasure? Glory? Experience points?

The objective of traditional roleplaying games is for players to set personal goals and achieve them at any cost. The traditional game structure rewards personal achievement with experience points that equate to monster killing and treasure hoarding. These are not ingredients in the Protocol series.

Certainly games have developed reward systems beyond that, but if your mind-set is to win, you're going to find a different game experience within these pages than someone who plays in order to be part of something or who just wants to "stay in character." So while it's impossible for everyone to share 100% of the same interests in the game, being completely at odds with the expectations of the mechanics is like expecting chess to have better touchdown rules.

Here, the goal is to write a good story. The reward is a well-written story.

THE SPIRIT OF THE GAME

Recognizing and respecting the spirit of play is essential to a good protocol session. Finding the chalice in the first scene, overcoming problems with a made up device, and always saying no to anything people contrive about your characters are not in the spirit of the game. Since the Protocol series lacks a gamemaster, everyone is responsible for monitoring what is and isn't part of the story. For instance, ripping off a character's arm can be dramatic, but also debilitating. Just because one person wants to play in a gonzo manner, does not mean the story supports this desire.

PROMPTS

Essentially, Protocol is a system of calculated prompts. Everything in this document — roles, motivations, questions, scenes — is meant to be here. It all works together into a web of interlocking ideas that the players turn into a story. I'll be the first person to admit that this is more of a rainy day activity than a game, but it follows the inherent logic of a storytelling game, without the added crunch of die rolls and statistics. That's what the drama points are for. You're only engaging for a few hours after all. The need for statistics is minimal in this kind of a game.

FRAMING SCENES

There are few specific rules on how to frame a scene. Protocol scenes require the inclusion of elements drawn by the cards. But this can sometimes prohibit creativity and create merciless stricture. The cards are there for guidance, not limitation. And while there are tried and true methods to help generate *better* scenes, ultimately you are playing without the designer present. If you decide to break the rules, make sure you understand why.

- Before starting play, be aware of just how many scenes you'll be directing. Don't squander one by rehashing of what you already know.
- *In media res* is the concept of starting in the middle of the action. Don't worry about how the characters got here. Being surrounded by a pack of wild dogs creates immediate tension.
- A good scene starts late and ends early. Open with a strong sentence that implies some kind of history. Call "scene" or "cut" before someone ruins a perfectly-timed line with a weak retort.
- Bookends and mirrors. Framing tools can be visual, obvious, grad school crutches. But they can still enhance a roleplaying experience. Don't be afraid to bookend a scene with the sample elements at the front and back. Don't be afraid to use something that's been used before.
- The micro-management of framing a scene can ensure the scene doesn't slip off the rails with precise details about everyone's role. Conversely, a hands-off approach can allow the drama to go in unexpected directions.
- Cause and effect are your friends. Let the characters' mistakes grow into drama for a following scene.
- Cliffhangers are useful in the middle of a story, but hold little value early on. Also, the action of Act III washes away any possible tension of "does he make the jump," because we will know soon enough.

BETTER VIGNETTES

Keep it simple. Do not resolve everything. Set the mood. Show the bad guys. Pay attention to where you are in the story and know when to start a new problem, complicate an existing problem, or end an ongoing problem.

BETTER INTERROGATIONS

Ask leading questions. Do not give the interviewee a chance to wiggle out of answering. Paint him into a corner. Insinuate problems or situations with the questions. But keep it thematic and appropriate.

The answer to any question is never no.

BETTER INTERLUDES

Protocol is about drama. Drama is about conflict. Conflict does not happen during a hug. Make sure the existing relationship is taken into account and use your interlude time as an opportunity to change or develop that relationship within the context of the scene's theme.

BETTER ENSEMBLES

Do not be afraid to take on the roles of NPCs. Give everyone a chance to add to the scene. Do not compete. Contrast and complement the other players. When someone is playing big, play small. When someone is playing loud, be calm. When someone is struggling to get involved, engage.

BETTER FINALES

The player directing the final scene of the game (before the finale) is not responsible for wrapping everything up. This is what the finale is for.

Bear in mind that the finale chart cannot predict where you've taken the story. The chart is merely a guideline. If you find the event jarring, ignore it and tell your stories as you see fit.

BETTER LOCATIONS

Like everything else in Protocol, the location cards are prompts. If you draw a location that is weird or just doesn't work for what's been going on, ignore it. Staying in one place for two scenes in a row is just fine. Try to honor the tone of the story and take things where they need to go.

Advanced players may ignore the location cards altogether.

BETTER SCENES

Do not force your agenda onto the story. This is the best way to derail what is going on. It may feel to you that the story is going slowly, but trust me, the pace is just fine. You have four turns around the table. If you force the game to advance on a timetable no one else can see, you will frustrate yourself... and others. Turning up the heat on the story may meet your criteria, but it's not always necessary.

WALKTHROUGH

This, like all walkthroughs, involves me sitting at my desk and drawing cards, dealing with whatever I get, just like you'll be doing when you play.

Four people sit down to play *Holy Diver*: Abe, Bianca, Carl, and Diana. Respectively, they have selected the characters of Exeter (gypsy), Fyre (captain of the helm), Giger (dreamer), and Hermione (keeper of the sign).

MOTIVATIONS

Abe draws a ♦7, indicating a cursed 'don't close the door' motivation. Not an easy combination. Abe decides that Exeter has a tendency to burn bridges, leaving him a cursed loner, even for a gypsy. He hopes that finding the Witch will remove the curse from him.

Bianca draws ♣10 — compelled motivated by wishing well/star. Fyre is not only the captain of the helm, with her own ship, she is also an expert navigator, compelled to follow the stars and let them take her wherever he ship needs to go next. This will certainly be invaluable to a group who seeks the Witch.

Carl draws ♠6. Giger is motivated impulsively by gotta get away. This is so easy, Carl feels like he cheating when he decides that Giger is loner, dreamer, vagabond, just following his inner muse. His wanderlust is a thing for the ages. Poets will write about it.

Diana draws ♦9, which is cursed look for the answer. Diana decides that Hermione is tied to Exeter's quest. She too seeks to find the signs and portents that explain his curse. And hopefully a cure for said curse.

Plus, Diana always plays goodie-two shoes characters.

RELATIONSHIPS

It's important to note, that while all characters know each other, they may not have important relationships with one another before play. Choosing two characters to have relationships means wanting to see those two characters work together.

Abe goes first, selecting Exeter and Hermione to share a relationship (based on their motivations). Drawing ♠3, Carl and Diana decide the community/working mystery indicates that no one knows how they got together or where they know each other before this. This leaves room to develop details during play.

Bianca wants to see a relationship between Fyre and Hermione, since the pair seem to be the most responsible on the journey. ♠5 reflects a community/working relationship based on wiseman/fool. The players come to the conclusion that Fyre sees Hermione as being foolish for joining this gypsy and guiding his personal vision of the quest.

Carl selects Exeter and Giger, drawing ♥7 — romantic bleeding. Abe and Carl determine that Giger is drawn to Exeter for reasons only his internal compass can explain. But he knows Giger would die (bleed) for Exeter. Exeter senses Giger's fondness, but can't be distracted from the quest.

Diana goes last and selects Giger and Hermione and draws a ♥J. Another romantic relationship, this one is focused on jesters. Diana determines that her focus on Exeter is not romantic at all, but something about Giger draws her to him. He is a dreamer who does not take anything seriously and she's never met anyone quite like him. Giger of course is unaware of her infatuation.

WORLD BUILDING

With the relationships finished, the group decides to use a random method for the world building Q&A. They decide that the reason they seek the witch is to cure Exeter's curse. Bianca adds that Fyre is here because she's been hired to take them to the horizon.

Abe selects question 1: *"Why does the omen 'don't talk to strangers' make you nervous?"*

- Exeter is a loner. His curse assures that he cannot be close to people. Developing lasting relationships is hard. Talking to strangers even more so. The omen's application to his present predicament is obvious and oddly convenient to the story.

Bianca selects question 10: *"Name and describe the one who will blind your eyes and steal your dreams."*

- Fyre is convinced that Exeter will be her undoing. She has a premonition that the witch will say her eyes and dreams will be necessary to remove the curse.

Carl selects question 4: *"Some call the Witch, Lady Evil? Why? Does she have another name?"*

- The Witch is temperamental. She is not to be disrespected or trifled with. One must only whisper in her presence. She is also known as the Queen of Twilight.

Diana chooses question 5: *"Which of these verses of the Witch's song is true? Never trust shadows? The lady takes your vision? She's the queen of the night?"*

- Playing upon Fyre's fears, Diana selects the verse, 'the lady takes your vision.' She also decides that this is a well-known rumor about the Witch, though it's never been proven.

THE OPENING SCENE

Diana directs the opening scene, selecting Mystery for her vignette focus.

"The group gathers on the deck of Fyre's ship, the Golden Rainbow. Storm clouds gather and everyone knows it's time to disembark. Looking at one another, they know the journey will be rough. Reading the eyes of her comrades, Hermione worries a little that none of them know where they are truly going until they start to go, trusting both Fyre and Giger to know the way."

NAME/ROLE

MOTIVATION

RELATIONSHIPS

SCENES
□□□□

DRAMA
POINTS

NOTES

