

Deserting Paradise

All you wanted was to live forever.



Mcdaldno & Team Fremen

Not that any of us even owned a fucking computer, but we stopped using computers when The Man started looking for us. It was too easy for him to tap in, you know, to trace us.

Skittles cut up that credit card his parents gave him the just in case of emergency one that we used to front the money for drugs, mostly. I forced Jaquelin to leave her passport behind, between the floorboards at Cuttie's, because I heard somewhere that people can, like, GPS the fucking things now. Chip sensors.

I don't know if that's gonna matter though. Because when The Man can't find us through his sick little puppet law enforcement types, he'll start in with the bad voodoo freaks. And then the nightmare things, the fucking extradimensionals and the mindfuck not-theres. You don't know what I'm talking about yet, because let me just tell you, this whole world is full of spooky shit, like demon shit and voodoo shit and magic.

Oh, yeah. And it's not like he's just going to sit around and send henchmen. He'll come too. All we wanted was to live forever. Now, I don't know if any of us will outlast the week.

Deserting Paradise

Gather together 2-4 friends, intent on playing this game. Read aloud, to the group.

Stan isn't the first one to have fucked with the laws of nature. He isn't the first to have stolen immortality. He isn't the first to have drawn the ire of The Man.

But he is the youngest.

Deserting Paradise is, in many ways, Stan's story. But it's also going to be yours. Because although playing with supernatural forces is no game, for the next few hours, we're going to pretend it is.

We're going to play a story, where we are all acting and roleplaying. Each of you is going to create and be a character, a street punk who fucked with the laws of nature, and stole immortality. You'll be on the run. From me.

I'm going to have a different role. I'm going to play The City, and The Man, and everything that wants you dead. I'll be playing both antagonist & scenery.

The Mangy Punks

Read aloud, to the group.

So, here's the set-up: you're a group of friends, and you're all sketchy street punks. You hated seeing your friends grow up and burn out on their dreams and ideals. You hated seeing your parents, if you have any, pretending that they're still driven and useful like they used to be. You hated seeing passion fade into nothingness.

The whole world is in danger of becoming one big fucking suburb, right? One big fucking suburb of the City of Dead Dreams. And all you wanted was to not be a part of that ugly future.

And so you decided that you wanted to stay young forever. Like Peter Pan's fucking posse. And funny enough, when you want something bad enough, and you don't have a day job and so you can just spend all your fucking time looking for it, you find it.

Which is how the group of you came to be immortal.

You did it to escape the man, right? Lowercase t, lowercase m. But in doing so, you drew the attention of The Man. Uppercase T, uppercase M.

And the thing is, that immortality? No one ever gave you permission to have it. You didn't have a watcher for the final ritual. No one purified the rabbit blood. You just fucking did it, and fuck the consequences.

Well, now the consequences are about ready to fuck you back.

You've got some survival skills, and they'll help you escape the city, hopefully. You've got some magic, too. It'll help you out of a bind, but it'll also make The Man more furious.

You've got your skin, and you can risk it when you have to.

But, finally, before you can leave this city-come-alive, the city that's trying to kill you, you've got some Unfinished Business to attend to.

And that's what the game is about, for you: escaping The Man, surviving The City, attending to Unfinished Business, and toying with elements outside your control.

In order to start playing, we're going to make characters, and flesh out those skills those magic powers, and that unfinished business.

Creating Characters

Read aloud, to the group.

So, everyone plays an immortal street punk on the run from The Man and his forces, yeah? Everyone needs a character sheet, available on the last page.

Give your street punk a name. Don't make it douchy, because your friends will ridicule you and you'll look like a fucking poser, okay?

So, like, a regular name (Stan, Jamie, Bob, Tyson). Or a sexy name that others want to do you just for having (Jaquelin, Morgan, Lucia). Or a kind-of gross nickname, or a kind-of stupid nickname, that you embraced just because it made you feel included (Chuckles, Balls, Porky, Spinner).

Now, you have 9 points, and you spend them on your skills and your magic powers. It's like this, you have three skills: Beg, Borrow, Steal. They're described below. Divide up most of your points amongst those three skills, and then any leftover points you spend to buy magic powers.

Probably spend 7-8 points on skills, and 1-2 on magic powers, but it's totally your choice.

Beg is about leveraging your humanity, to get something for nothing. You might beg for your life, or beg for forgiveness, or beg for food. Begging makes clear a hierarchy of power, with the beggar below. Beg is typically how you interact with a stranger.

Borrow is about leveraging trust, to get something for a promise. You might borrow money, or borrow a gun, or borrow a friend's couch to crash on. Borrowing always comes with an expectation of repayment, whether or not that payment is equivalent. Borrow is typically how you interact with a friend.

Steal is about leveraging skill, to get something without asking. You might steal food, or steal access into a building, or steal someone's shit while they sleep. Stealing is always riskier if you fail, compared to begging and borrowing. Steal is how you avoid interacting with others to get what you want.

So, like, I don't have a lot going for me, you know? But I manage to get by pretty good. I got puppy-dog eyes and they help me piece together most of my meals (Beg 2), and I know some tough fucking dudes if I ever get into trouble (Borrow 3). Sticky fingers have caused me trouble in the past, but they've also solved some trouble, too (Steal 2). Of course, I got my magic, too.

Each remaining point lets you buy one magic power. Magic isn't a free lunch, though, and you should make sure to keep that in mind. Every time you use a magic power, you give resources to The Man.

Glamour

If you have a few minutes absolutely alone with someone, you will automatically succeed at an attempt to Borrow. Further, they'll obey any non-violent commands you give them. Later, they might reassess the choices they made, so be careful with this one.

Darkness Waiting

You can materialize from the shadows, revealing yourself to have been present throughout any dimly-lit scene. Your presence must be logistically possible.

Reaching Through Mirrors

You can reach through mirrors, and take the things you need from wherever they are. You can make a Steal roll from far away. Failing can have some bizarre consequences though, like falling through the mirror to wherever you were reaching.

Truth-Witching

Stare deep into someone's eyes after they say something, and learn whether they were telling the truth.

Barking in Tongues

If you act as it does and eat as it does, you become capable of speaking to an animal in its native tongue. Your conversation can involve complex and abstract reasoning.

Form of Beast

If you yank the soul from an animal, which you know how to do, you can inhabit its body and become it for a short time. Your human form will still be somewhere, cold and waiting.

Open Brain

While in a place, or performing an action, you can hear the thoughts of all those around you. With great effort, you can block the thoughts of particular individuals.

The Universe Delivers

When you want something specific, ask a stranger for it. If it is remotely possible that they might have it, they do. You'll still need to get it from them, though, so hopefully they respond well to begging.

Dolls

When you tamper with the likeness of a person, the harm or implications are wrought upon the actual person as well.

So, at this point, you've spent 9 points between your skills (beg, borrow and steal) and your magic powers.

There's a little section on the character sheet to record Skin. You start with 6 Skin, and you can lose it over time. It's basically how much violence your body can handle before you're wrecked. If you ever hit 0 Skin, you'll be a sitting duck and The Man will know it.

The last major part of character creation is determining your Unfinished Business. You start with three pieces of Unfinished Business. This is the stuff you need to do before you leave the city.

It can be supernatural in nature, or about seeking revenge, or about gathering supplies, or about making peace with the people and pieces of your life. Trying to leave the city before you've dealt with your Unfinished Business is a recipe for disaster.

So, when we realized we needed to get out, and that we might wind up dead if we didn't. . . the crazy thing is that none of us just packed up our shit and left.

Because, yeah, The Man was after us, and all the

dreadful implications that come with that. . . but in the back of our minds, we couldn't help thinking, shit, we're going to live forever. We've transcended mortality. The worst that The Man can do at this point is hurt us.

And besides, we got into this whole mess so that we could stand by our values forever. How fucked would it be if we abandoned them right off the bat? Super fucked.

So, Skittles has this mess-up sister who needed bail. And he needed to talk to his dad one last time, and get some closure. And he wanted to find a gun, so that we'd at least have some sort of defense.

Lucia had this voodoo mindfuck thing tattooed across her shoulderblades, and she needed it removed, because it would act like a freakin' homing beacon for demons and the like. Before that, though, she wanted to say goodbye to her girlfriend, or invite her. And last of all, she wanted to confess her sins, like in a fucking church and everything.

I still had Lucky's switchblade, and that was like a blood loan, you know? I wanted to hook up with Jenny before we left, because it was headed there. And last, I heard of a protection ritual I wanted to try.

Finally, the character sheet has a big blank space. That's for recording all the stuff that you think is important - what your character looks like, how many smokes they have left, when they last slept indoors, and so on. Whatever seems relevant.

The City Wakes

Read this to yourself; collaborate on the choices.

So, everyone else just created a character. You walked them through how to do it. Now, it's your turn. Except, you don't control one sad little punk kid. You control a whole fucking city, come alive.

The City is your first character. The Man is your second. You get to play both, and their underlings.

The City is built up out of three stats: Law, which is how tough and organized the cops are, or whoever it is that really enforces the laws in your city; Occult, which is how thick the place is with weird magic practitioners, and how much the supernatural has sway over the city; and Sprawl, which is how wide the suburbs stretch, and how hard it is physically to escape the city, and how lifeless the place can be.

Law, Occult and Sprawl. You have 7 points to spend

between these three stats. For each stat, depending on the value you assign it, pick one tag from the list.

Law 1

A Lawless City; Inept Cops; Freewheelin' Gang Chaos

Law 2

Well Coordinated Police; Gangs Run Everything; Pervasive Watchfulness

Law 3

Mob Law; Hardened Police Force; Ruled by Fear

Law 4

SWAT teams and riot squads; Heavy Intelligence

Occult 1

Good Christian Folk; A One Psychic Town

Occult 2

Voodoo Folk; Ritual Practitioners; Others Like You

Occult 3

Covens and Coteries; Things Go Bump in the Night; Demons Walk the Streets

Occult 4

Warring Covens; On a Fucking Hellmouth

Sprawl 1

Intentional Community; A Truly Modern City

Sprawl 2

Rolling Suburbs; Connected by Bridges;
Ugly Ghettos

Sprawl 3

Abandoned Districts; One City Borders the Next;
Geographically Isolated; Maze-Like

Sprawl 4

Unending Cityscape; Unending Suburbia

Divide your 7 points between those three stats (Law, Occult and Sprawl). Choose one descriptive tag to characterize each of those stats, from the appropriate level. These three stats and their tags should create a distinct image for your city.

A city with Law 2 (Pervasive Watchfulness), Occult 1 (One Psychic Town), and Sprawl 4 (Unending Suburbia) creates a distinct image: a million quiet cul-de-sacs, populated by paranoid and drone-like families, eager to judge and alienate the different.

A city with Law 3 (Mob Law), Occult 2 (Voodoo Folk), and Sprawl 2 (Ugly Ghettos) creates a very

different image: a city damaged but also held together by organized crime, where occult students and voodoo practitioners are allowed to practice their craft, but only in marginalizing ghettos.

Discuss your choices with the players, and work to establish a collaborative vision of The City.

Right, so, we came from Cableton. It was a tight-ass city, with security cameras and volunteer watches all over the downtown core (Law 2 - Pervasive Watchfulness). The bus was dangerous - they had our faces on wanted posters all around town, and those drivers were real dicks about stuff like that.

We weren't the only punk-ass kids on the run though, which was both good and bad (Occult 2 - Others Like You). Good because we had allies. Bad because they'd sell us out in a heartbeat.

The only good thing about Cableton was the Hollows. See, Cableton used to be much bigger than it is now. Like, half the city is abandoned. So, there's always somewhere to sleep (Sprawl 3 - Abandoned Districts).

That's Cableton - a paranoid downtown, and an empty mid-town. Us, and others like us, on the run - except, more like, holed up in some derelict apartment tower.

Bow to The Man

Read this to yourself; collaborate on the choices

You've created The City, and now the next step is to create The Man. The Man is a person (or perhaps an un-person, like a demon or something) who's pursuing the punks. His ultimate goal is to get justice for their trespass against nature, and against him. They have effectively stolen from him, and they've stolen the single most dangerous thing in the world - immortality.

So, that's what we know about The Man so far. He is powerful, he is real, he has been wronged, and he wants vengeance. The rest is about to be revealed.

The Man has three stats, like The City does. They are Act, Command and Buy. Act is all about when The Man does his own dirty work, hitting the pavement himself, fighting his own fights; Command is used when The Man sends others, his own personal soldiers, to do his bidding; Buy is used when The Man widens his sphere of influence, and taps into new networks to help him in his hunt.

The Man gets 7 points to divide between these stats, just like with The City. For each stat, one tag gets

chosen from the list at that level, just like The City.

Act 1

Delegation is My Weapon; Barred from this World

Act 2

Stronger Than Any Mortal; Blood on My Hands; Uncanny Timing

Act 3

Travels Through Mirrors; Body Thief; Unstoppable

Act 4

Unshackled by Time; Fate Itself; Fury Itself

Command 1

Thug Lieutenants; Cops On My Payroll;
A Dark Servant on Retainer

Command 2

Vampires Bow to Me; Legions of Mortal Servants

Command 3

I Rule This City; Fealty Beyond the Veil;
Unholy Allegiances; Head of the Mages Tribunal

Command 4

King of Hell; King of Heaven; King of Earth

Buy 1

All Cops Are Crooked; Debts To Claim;
Everyone Talks Eventually

Buy 2

I Know Every Guy; Fear Tactics;
Limitless Coiffers; Even Punks Love Money

Buy 3

Backroom Puppeteer; Hypnotizing Lure;
Richest Beyond Your Wildest Dreams

Buy 4

Loyalty is Just a Number; Impossible to Resist;
Knows Everyone's Secret Fears and Desires

Any combination ought to paint a strong picture of who The Man is. If The Man has Act 1 (Delegation is My Weapon), Command 2 (Legions of Mortal Servants) and Buy 4 (Loyalty is Just a Number), then maybe The Man is the mayor of The City, a crooked politician who robs the city coffers dry.

If The Man has Act 2 (Blood on My Hands), Command 4 (King of Hell), and Buy 1 (Everyone Talks Eventually), we get a different image, perhaps a violent devil in a black suit, one cell phone call away from legions of demons and succubi.

While The Man is your character, you should invite all the players to collaborate and offer suggestions, as The Man will be their antagonist and the springboard to much of their story.

Make sure you have a clear idea of how The Man and The City interact - whether one controls the other, whether they are at odds, whether one is the result of the other, and so on.

We learned about him, bit by bit. He could take the form of anyone he wanted to (Act 3 - Body Thief). He had a penchant for showing up as our fathers, or childhood friends.

He was in league with dark things from outside this world - like monsters and not-there mindfucks (Command 2 - Fealty Beyond the Veil). I learned quick that faeries were deadly as anything.

And all the cops, all the drivers, all the mall watch guards, they were all in his pay (Buy 1 - All Cops Are Crooked).

He was anyone. The law was in his pocket. And he could reach beyond this world and pull back-up from somewhere else. We grew paranoid as fuck, and learned that we could only trust ourselves.

Getting Ready to Play

Read this aloud, to the group

At this point, each of you has a punk character, someone who's stolen immortality and is now on the run. They all have 3 pieces of Unfinished Business.

I have The City, and The Man.

We're going to play out an episode of Deserting Paradise now. It'll take 1-3 hours, depending on how directly we angle towards our goals for the episode.

In each episode, you each choose one piece of Unfinished Business to try and resolve. I choose an agenda for The Man, and for The City. Agendas for The Man are usually about solidifying resources, destroying things and closing in on you. Agendas for The City are usually about righting some kind of imbalance, driving you out of a certain district, or getting you wrapped up in some ongoing conflict.

Throughout the episode, you'll need to stave off The Man, contend with The City, and try to resolve your Unfinished Business. Go ahead and choose which Unfinished Business you're going to pursue, while I write my two Agendas.

Writing Agendas

Read this to yourself; write Agendas privately

In each episode, both The Man and The City have an Agenda. You write them in secret, and try to accomplish them across the episode. Sometimes, these Agendas will be easy to accomplish, and sometimes they'll take strategizing.

The Man's Agendas - Some Examples

Shut Down the I-43; Take Skittles' Father Hostage; Buy Out the Police Force; Track Down Their Hideout; Use Murder as Bait; Poison Their Source of Information; Keep Them Off Public Transit.

The City' Agendas - Some Examples

Drive Them Out of Oldstown; Put Them in the Middle of a Gang War; Entrench Them in Southside's Drug Problem; Strand Them in Walmsley; Keep Them Hungry; Bring the Cops to Their Door

It was bad. Cabs wouldn't stop for us anymore, buses became too dangerous. Lucia's bike got jacked. (The Man - Keep Them Off Public Transit).

And The Hollows weren't safe anymore, all fires and raids (The City - Drive Them Out of The Hollows).

Playing the Game

Read this aloud, to the group.

So, we all share the responsibility of framing scenes. Think about where the action would be interesting to pick back up, and describe who's there and what's happening.

The first scene can be pretty simple - a social moment to anchor the characters. But soon, The City and The Man will start pursuing their Agendas, and you all have Unfinished Business to pursue.

So, narrate your characters trying to deal with that Unfinished Business. You can all travel everywhere together, or you can go off on your own. Both have their risks - one wastes time, the other isolates you.

When you want something that someone else has, or you want to stand up to someone, that requires a roll of the dice. When I want something that one of you has, or I want to fuck up your life, that requires a roll of the dice too. You guys don't roll dice to beg and borrow from each other - just act it out.

When one of you does magic, I get a Transgression Token. The Man can spend those to do nasty stuff.

Rolling Dice

Read this aloud, to the group. Demonstrate.

Whenever someone rolls the dice, they roll a single six-sided die, and add some modifiers to it. If their total is 7 or higher, they get what they wanted, or things happen like they wanted them to.

When you Beg, Borrow or Steal, you add your skill rating and the modifiers on the next page.

When you want to do something else, and it might get you hurt, you take it out of your skin. Roll the die, plus modifiers on the next page. If you're below 7, you can lose Skin equal to the difference in order to succeed, or you can fail. It's your choice.

When you use one of your magic powers, it just happens. You don't roll any dice, but you do give a Transgression Token to The Man. That's bad.

When The City tries to trap you, prevent you from doing something, or come after you, I add one of my stats (Law, Occult or Sprawl) to the roll.

When The Man tries to Act, or Command others, or Buy someone's support, I add that stat to my roll.

Roll Modifiers

Refer to this during play.

Whenever the punks make a roll, there are a bunch of situational modifiers that get applied. This is not the case for The City or The Man's die rolls.

Beg Roll Modifiers

They don't want it anyways +1, It's only important to you +1, it's cheap +1, you've asked for something from them already -1, you've asked for something already this scene -1, they're vicious or angry -1, you're asking them to disobey orders -1.

Borrow Roll Modifiers

They know you +1, They trust you +1, You repayed your last debt +1, They don't need it right now +1, They know they'll get it back +1, It's a big favour -1, It endangers them -1, They're greedy or needy -1, They've been burned recently -1.

Steal Roll Modifiers

Someone taught you how to do this +1, You've done it before +1, It's easy to steal +1, You aren't distracted +1, They're watching you -1, You don't fit in here -1, It's important -1, It's well-guarded -1, they've caught you before -1.

Skin Roll Modifiers

You're trying to escape +1, You take them by surprise +1, you're better armed +1, they're vulnerable to you +1, you're cornered -1, you're outnumbered -1, they're bigger than you -1.

Right, so, Jaquelin had been grabbed by the fucking cops, and she was in the back of their car. And one of the cops was interrogating some random guy on the street, while the other was in the car, talking on a cell phone. I did the only thing I could think to. I snuck around to Jaquelin's side of the car, and tried to open up the door and get her out, without dickweed on his cell phone noticing. Dumb, I know.

I'm pretty good at this sort of stuff (Steal 2), and my brother showed me once how to jack a car (Someone taught you how to do this +1). But she was well-guarded (-1), and it was high stakes (it's important -1). Luck wasn't on my side (rolled a 3, plus 1 = 4). The first cop saw the top of my head, and came around the car with a gun drawn, telling me to kiss the fucking ground, and stuff like that.

And so that was the fall-out. I was either getting arrested or shot. And so, I did the only thing I could think to. I rushed the cop and tried to snatch his gun. Dumb, I know.

So, right, having failed to bust Jaquelin out of the cruiser, I decided to rush the cop and try to snatch his gun. I'm not very bright, if you haven't figured that out yet.

I had the element of surprise (+1), but I was outnumbered (-1), and outmatched (they're bigger than you -1). So, I was attempting this at a disadvantage, for sure. But the adrenalin must have coursed through my veins something fierce in that moment (Roll 5, minus 1 = 4). There was a split second where I probably could have changed my mind, hit the ground sobbing instead of doing what I did. But I was committed. He got a shot off (losing 3 Skin to make up the difference between the score and 7), and it hurt like hell, but the gun ended up in my hands.

Now, I'd managed to wrestle my victory out of the universe, and the universe responded by giving me my moment to shine. That cop was a sitting duck, and without thinking it over too hard I put one in the side of his skull. Down and out.

I turned back to the car, expecting a shootout to ensue with his partner, right? Wrong. He was turned back, eyes fixed on Jaquelin. His jaw slack, headed bobbing up and down in agreement with whatever sick

ideas she was lacing into his skull. I had seen her do this before, with other men. It got her what she wanted, but ever time it gave me the fucking creeps (The Man takes a Transgression Token, as Jaquelin uses Glamour). He let her out of the car, apologized, and climbed into the driver's seat. Without so much as wiping his partner's blood off the side-view mirror, he drove away.

"Alright, let's get the fuck out of here," Jaquelin said. "Before he realizes what he just did." And so we fled, both terrified of what the other had just done.

Succeeding and Failing

Read this aloud, to the group.

Now, in Stan's example, he failed his first roll and succeeded his second roll. When he failed, there were consequences (a cop arresting him at gunpoint), but they weren't insurmountable.

Consequences are most interesting when they invite the person to take even more drastic action to overcome them. The consequence of failing his roll meant that Stan was in a position where rushing an armed cop was on the table as part of a tough choice.

In general, when one of you fails, I get to pick one of the following things, and play it out:

Failing a Beg Roll

The person gets hostile; No one has what you need; your presence is exposed to the wrong people

Failing a Borrow Roll

You burn a relationship; you already owe them; they give it to you, with some ugly strings attached

Failing a Steal Roll

You face an ugly ultimatum; you're isolated from your friends; you get hurt (lose 1-2 Skin)

Failing a Skin Roll

You get hurt (lose 1-2 Skin); you face an ugly ultimatum; you're captured or entrenched; now even more people want you dead

The first time I fail a roll for The City or The Man, my Agenda for them gets exposed. After my first failure in each case, you guys get to choose

Failing a Law, Occult or Sprawl Roll

The City is held at bay (cannot use that stat again this episode); The City is wounded (reduce that stat by 1); The City gives you what you wanted

Failing an Act, Command or Buy Roll

The Man entrusts the task to an incompetent; The Man oversteps his place (lose 1 Transgression Token); The Man succeeds, but is distracted now

When someone succeeds, they get what they wanted, and they also get the drop on the situation. If you succeed at begging, you get what you needed and can now use whatever it is that you procured. If you succeed at stealing, you can put that stolen thing into use.

In Stan's example, on the previous 2 pages, when Stan failed his Steal Roll, he faced an ugly ultimatum. When he succeeded at his Skin Roll, he got the drop on the situation, and in this case, that meant that he shot the cop dead before anyone could do anything else. The person running The City didn't call for another Skin Roll to shoot the cop dead, because Stan had the drop and forcing a second roll wasn't as interesting as just letting him kill the man.

Pursuing Agendas & Episode Pacing **Read this to yourself; explain if necessary.**

Mostly, let the punks dictate the action. When they want to carry the action to the Southside mall, let

them, and simply look for obstacles and problems where they go, with what they're pursuing. When you think The City would naturally want to get in their way, or they'd naturally run afoul of The Man, then figure out what you want from the situation and roll one of your stat trying to get it.

When they come across people who they want something from, or who they want to stay safe from, make them roll their stats.

Roll with the complications. Via those complications, put them in sticky situations where they'll be likely to lose Skin or use magic. Collect those Transgression Tokens with glee.

Over time, let your Agendas bubble up. There'll be a moment of down-time, of re-grouping, and that's when you cut to the chase and try and accomplish your Agenda.

You can do this by bringing the Agenda to them, if it makes sense. Have The Man send his demon legion to their hideout, or have The Man cut them off on the subway, himself in the flesh.

You can also do this by cutting away to somewhere else, where you're pursuing your Agenda. It's fine to

simply say, "While you're hiding in that dumpster, waiting for the cops to leave, why don't we take a peek at what The Man is doing? Oh! He's in your house, Lucia! That's strange. What's he doing there? Oh... oh my. He's got some rope, and he's creeping up on your father, who's glued to the TV."

See, it only takes a couple successful rolls to achieve either of your Agendas. So, there's no need to aggressively hunt them down. Just let them simmer until the perfect moment, and then spring them.

If you fuck up a roll, you really fuck it up. You don't handwave the punks' failures, and so you don't get to handwave your own, either. The Man is fallible. The City is just a pile of bricks and people.

Transgression Tokens

Read this aloud, to the group.

When you use magic, I get a Transgression Token. I just get to hoard them for as long as I want to. Eventually, I can use them to let The Man do nefarious things. This includes showing up, breaking reality, gaining power, trapping you, and complicating your Unfinished Business. Eventually, it might include reversing your immortality.

Spending Transgression Tokens

Refer to this during play.

Spend 1 token to introduce a complication to someone's Unfinished Business

This might include having the person they are trying to find be elsewhere or missing in action, having the dealer raise the price at the last minute, or something similar. As a rule of thumb, it should take 1 additional successful Beg, Borrow or Steal roll to resolve the Unfinished Business.

Spend 1 token to have The Man uncover clues about the punks' whereabouts or plans

These clues are useful in that they seed The Man's future Agendas, and give The Man permission to wage battle on new fronts - their home, the places of their loved ones, or elsewhere.

Spend 1 token to gain +1 in an attempt to stopping a punk from leaving The City.

This is described in detail on page 19.

Spend 2 tokens to have The Man re-roll a failed die roll (skipping the consequences for failure)

The punks get to break the laws of nature, so why shouldn't The Man do the same to apprehend them?

Spend 2 tokens to have The Man show up, wherever he wants to, whenever he wants to

Just like that, he's there. Anywhere.

Spend 2 tokens to separate and isolate the punks

Now, there are other conditions which lead to isolation and separation, but when you spend those 2 tokens, you get to engineer a situation out of thin air, and it's uncontested.

Spend 2 tokens to create new Unfinished Business

Pick a punk, and give them new problems to deal with. This will only make sense if you collaborate to make sure they care about the new problem.

Spend 3 tokens to do transgressive magic

The Man holds within his skin the secrets of all the transgressive magical acts. Snake-whispering, soul-swapping, storm-summoning, demon-drafting. He can do it all. When you spend 3 tokens, he can do whatever the fuck he wants to.

Except, he can't kill the punks. He can't reverse their immortality. Only they can - they have to give up their immortality freely. All he can do is capture them and hurt them and stick otherworldly demons in their heads and make them want to give up their immortality.

How Episodes Go

Look to this for clarification and guidance.

Picture Deserting Paradise as a television show. Tom Waits comes on during the credits, rasping Don't Wanna Grow Up. We see shaky shots of alleyways, and maybe one of the shots ends with a burnt film reel. Close-ups of tired street punks, and occasional flashes of cultists in robes, voodoo priestesses sacrificing chickens, and maybe messy teen sex.

Deserting Paradise is an HBO show. It takes the stuff promised in the True Blood opening credits, and it delivers on it. Except, instead of desperate people in backwoods Louisiana, it's desperate punks in an occult-laced inner city.

Every episode opens with someone anxious about their Unfinished Business. And we quickly learn that they aren't the only ones anxious to get their life in order.

So people maybe pair off, or fight about whose shit to deal with first, and we cut away to The Man chewing scenery on some other set, like Spike throughout the whole second season of Buffy.

Soon enough, the punks are in motion. Some of this stuff is easy to resolve. Skittles gets the drugs to Ramsey, begs a couple hits for himself, and that's dealt with. Some of the Unfinished Business spawns complications, though, and a few of those complications set up the conflicts that'll drive the whole episode - Lucia gets arrested, Jaquelin gets roped into a voodoo ritual against her will, that sort of thing.

As things start to get ugly, The City and The Man kick into gear, for real now. They escalate the problems, and they pursue those secret agendas that got hinted at along the way.

Conflicts have a slow build, but then hit a pressure cooker moment. The punks have to get themselves hurt, or they have to do some bad magic. In the best of all worlds, both end up happening, and the punks look badass while endangering themselves.

The Man will likely accrue a couple Transgression Tokens per session. Those'll be used to exasperate situations, and to complicate Unfinished Business.

Any Unfinished Business that gets complicated, it'll likely become a focal point of the episode. Once Skittles and Lucia have dealt with their shit, they'll

double back to help Stan or Jaquelin with whatever they've gotten themselves tangled up in. They'll be struggling to resolve that, as The Man and The City struggle to meet their agendas, and that's kind of the climactic finish to the episode.

At the End of Every Episode

Read this aloud, to the group.

By the end of the episode, each of you will have made an asserted effort to resolve your Unfinished Business. If it's still unfinished, you have a choice to make: you can abandon it, or you can continue to pursue it during the next episode.

By the end of the episode, I'll either have accomplished my Agendas or been foiled. While there are dice involved, my success or failure will have more to do with the game's pacing and my priorities in how I react to your guys' actions.

Accomplishing these things has purely narrative weight. There are no bonuses to die rolls, or big mechanical implications. They affect the story and the space in which we are creating the story. That's it.

Leaving the City

Read this aloud, to the group.

At some point, you'll want to try and leave the city, for serious. You'll narrate what you're doing to get out, and I'll choose to oppose you with either The Man or The City (picking a stat that makes sense). If nothing else makes sense, I'll use Sprawl, because that's about how convoluted and outstretched the city itself is.

We each roll a six-sided die. You add the amount of Finished Business you have (which is pieces of Unfinished Business that you have since resolved). I add the stat that I chose, plus I can choose to spend Transgression Tokens for +1 each on the roll - though I have to make that choice before rolling.

We each roll, and add our modifier. You win, you walk. I win, you're stuck, and we figure out why.

On a tie, I pose an ultimatum to you. You can walk away at great personal cost, or you can stay here, and save whatever it is that's being threatened.

How the Season Goes

Look to this for clarification and guidance.

If you're only playing one episode of Deserting Paradise, The Man probably won't manage to get any of the punks to revoke their immortality, nor will any of the punks manage to escape The City. And that's fine! If you're only playing one episode, just focus on how the Unfinished Business and Agendas shake out.

But if you're playing several episodes, perhaps over a couple weeks, then you've got a season going on. And a season has a few extra levels of action going on.

Hold to the episode structure. In every episode, each of the punks tries to resolve another piece of Unfinished Business. The Man tries to pursue some dark Agenda, as does The City.

But there are bigger patterns and trends that'll appear. The punks will develop an obvious group dynamic - a leader, a grunt, that sort of thing. The person playing The Man will want to challenge that, and draw attention to it, and target the weak and marginalized at every opportunity. There'll be

moments during the season where the punks can be pitted against one another, and where they'll challenge and abandon one another. Be the grease on this wheel of infighting.

The Man should angle towards isolating characters, and using some nasty tactics in trying to convince them to revoke their immortality. Over the course of several episodes, Transgression Tokens can be built up and then spent to isolate and attack one of them.

The Man's Agendas will continually build towards a certain finale showdown. If he washes out the bridge during one episode, and attempts to make public transportation a dangerous proposition in the next episode, and then spends time buying out all the beat cops in Northpost and Brambles, then we have a season that's leading towards a possible finale showdown - one focused on geographic isolation, and entire districts off limits, and limited transportation. A city in lockdown.

The season will build towards its finale episode. Every looming evil that's underscored a conflict in the past is allowed to come crashing down in that finale. Someone might escape the city for good. Someone might fall into the hands of The Man, and revoke their immortality under a crushing threat.

After the Episode

Read this aloud, to the group, after play.

So, that was an episode of Deserting Paradise. What did you think? What worked? What didn't?

If we want to continue with another episode, we can do that at some point soon. What do you guys think?

[Cut to Black]

Thanks Are in Order

This is just me thanking people.

Thanks to Team Fremem, and all the other Game Chefs who helped me and offered ideas along the way. Deserting Paradise wouldn't have come together without you. For reals. I was ready to abandon Game Chef on Thursday.

Thanks to all the "teen monsters" stuff I've been watching lately, especially True Blood. True Blood is frustrating to watch, and that made me want to go do it different - without the douchy antihero, without the overwrought melodrama, without the static situation where nobody's losing stuff.

Thanks to Tom Waits, whose song Don't Wanna Grow Up gave me the inspiration for this game. Thanks to Johnny Hobo, whose song Church Hymn for the Condemned helped me clarify it. Thanks to Ogre and Lukas, for seperately reminding me that I love punk rock, sincerely and deeply.

Thanks to Sam, Dave, Fred and Kaleigh, for that drink at The Library. First time I pitched the idea.

Character sheets on the next two pages. Cheers.

Deserting Paradise

Punk

Name goes here.

Skin

Start with 6.

Skills

Spend up to 9 points on these.

Beg

Borrow

Steal

Magic Powers

Spend the remainder of 9.

Unfinished Business

Start with three, try to resolve one per episode.

Things of Note

Write whatever you want - age, looks, etc.

Deserting Paradise

The City

Spend 7 points on your stats. 1 tag each.

Law

Occult

Sprawl

Agenda

One per episode.

The Man

Spend 7 points on your stats. 1 tag each.

Act

Command

Buy

Agenda

One per episode.

Transgression Tokens: []