

Flashback and Fate

Principles of Flashback and Fate

- There is no preparation.
- The players take the role of cinniúint, narrating the actions of their character, taking random chance and altering continuity. All to drive the character towards their fate.
- The players have only just taken an interest in their characters, meaning they know very little about them at the beginning of the game.
- The game is primarily played in the 3rd person or with an authorial tone.
- Find out about the characters and the world by playing scenes full of action and adventure.
- Encourage genre twists and crazy mashups.
- Incorporate and bring the disparate elements together into a coherent whole.
- Characters gain traits in flashbacks where they elaborate their back story.
- Trade-offs in what-sided die to choose for your character's traits.
- The players can change key events in previous scenes to create new timelines.

Narrative Device

The players are the cinniúint, creatures of doom, destiny and design. Otherworldly, they have each taken an interest in a character. They take control of a character by influencing their decisions and deciding their luck. The goal is to have these characters meet defined fates..

Need to Play

- A bunch of index cards.
- Tools for writing on the index cards.
- Various many sided dice.

Building the Foundation

- **Genre and tone:** Agree on the general idea for your game: dungeon delving, gang of thieves, space exploration, contemporary drama, etcetera. Keep it short and vague (a few words, a short sentence at most) because things will evolve from there. The tone of Flashback and Fate is mostly serious, with a sprinkling of humour. Whilst at times there will be absurd situations, the characters take their world seriously. The players should discuss what themes and topics anyone would like to avoid for any reason.
- **Select the GM:** One player acts as the GM. The GM sets scenes, provides opposition for the other player's characters and portrays the rest of the world aside from the player characters. From now on, the term "player" excludes the GM.
- **Determine the Wild Card:** Each player should roll a d20. The player with the highest roll becomes the Wild Card. The Wild Card is a character that does not conform to the same narrative expectations of the other characters.
- **Character Concepts:** Every player should use an index card for their character information. Give the characters a name and two word description for the character concept. A typical two word description will be an adjective and a noun. The players should not consult with each other at this time. A character's concept should fit within the common understanding of the selected genre. The exception is the Wild Card character, who should be from an entirely different genre.
- **The Concept is a Trait:** Traits are discussed in greater detail later. A character's concept is their first trait and has a d10 die associated with it. Mark this on the character index card next to the concept.

- **Character Desires:** These are the goals and wants of the characters. They should fit into the character's genre and provide motivation for their actions. For each character, write down the following:
 - Something they want another character would object to.
 - Something they want another character desires.
 - Something they want that another character would help with.
- **Character Fates:** A goal of the players is to ensure that their characters meet certain fates. The fates the players are aiming for are randomly chosen. Each player should write down four fates on a small piece of scrap paper. Fates should be a mix of good and bad, happy and sad, simple and devious. Place all the fates into a suitable container and then each player draws two. One they keep for themselves, the other they must swap with another player. There is no limit to how many times a fate may be swapped. Competing fates for the same character are allowed. The GM may call a halt to fate swapping whenever they feel like as long as each player has swapped a fate. Fates are tied to a player, not a character. They stay with the player no matter which character they may be playing.

Example:

Matthildur's group has selected a Wild West genre for their game. In keeping with this, she's named her character Fast Tom and given him the concept Arrogant-Gunslinger. This has a d10 die associated with it. Renan has the Wild Card character. He's chosen a character from a Police Procedural genre. Called Jerry Hanson, Renan anchors his character into both genres by giving him the concept Embittered-Marshall.

Example:

Przemek has written down the following fates to be added to the random draw: Death of a loved one, Unsustainable success, Pyrrhic victory and Fought to the end. Kazuno has drawn Hunted down and Meets soulmate. She elects to swap Hunted down with another player, getting Cruelty to animals in return. Unhappy with this, she elects to swap again.

Style and Genre Notes

Once past the starting few scenes, the GM and players should explore the boundaries and tropes of the genre. Here are your guidelines for dealing with genre twists and oddness:

- Don't go goofy. Everyone in the world belongs in the world and has an anchor that makes sense within the terms of the game. Anchor everything.
- Work with what you have. Pay attention to the details, people, locations and established events that have already been introduced into the game fiction. Anything odd should be connected to established facts and related to established characters and events.
- Don't add new things too fast. Give new elements time to make sense and find their place.
- Spread scene types amongst the characters, giving each player the time and space to uncover the back story of their characters.
- Establish facts by seeing them played out in scenes, not by talking about them as players.

Initial Game Sequence

- GM establishes the starting scene
- Play the first scene for a while
- GM calls for a question
- Flashback to a scene that answers that question
- Complete the flashback scene
- Proceed with further scenes

Scenes

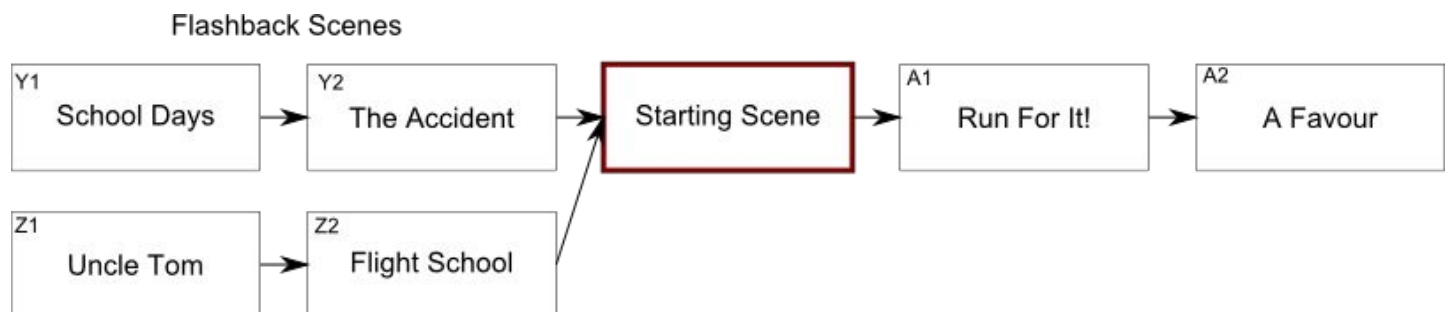
The GM sets a scene establishing the setting, initial action and which characters are present. This is written down on an index card. Once the scene is set, the GM should allow the players to narrate their character actions, but keep looking for opportunities to present the characters with tough choices, ripe situations or questions to answer. Any time a character wishes to interact with the world the GM can either allow it or call for a roll off. Any time a character wishes to do something to a player character that player can either allow it or call for a roll off. The GM brings the scene to an end once the scene seems to have reached a natural conclusion or wishes to ask a question to start a flashback scene. The GM makes a note on the index card of the result of a key moment or dice roll that the group believes was important in deciding the resolution of the scene.

Example

The GM calls a scene in which Mario's and Stephan's characters are navigating a labyrinth. After many hours searching and difficulty they reach a decision point. Do they go upward into the greater keep or delve deeper into the darkest caves. The decision to return to the keep is marked on the scene's index card as the key moment of the scene.

The Timeline

As scenes are completed, the GM should lay out the index cards to form a timeline of events. It may be helpful to give each scene an identifier and mark on the card which scenes come before and afterwards. This will aid maintaining continuity and allow for the timeline to be easily rebuilt. Scene are laid out left to right, with newer scenes added to the right. Flashback scenes are placed to the left of the starting scene and arranged into a timeline for each character.



The Starting Scene: In Media Res

The GM establishes the first scene by describing a scene that is already in the midst of action, ripe with possibilities. It could be a chase through an asteroid field; a vicious knife fight; a deadly trap; a high stakes poker game. Anything is viable provided it is grounded firmly in the group's selected genre. At least two of the player characters should appear in the scene. The players supply why their characters are present in the scene and what they are doing. Little detail is required at this point as the back story will be filled out by flashback scenes later. The scenes plays out until the GM finds a good question to ask about one of the characters that relates to the action that has happened so far. For example, *"I wonder how Alima got so much information about the occultists"* or *"How does Dennis know the leader of the rebels, anyhow?"* This question triggers the end of the present scene and starts a flashback scene that will address the question.

This first scene is the first index card. It should be marked with a distinctive border. This is the point at which the players, the cinniúint, started to interfere with the character's lives.

Flashback Scenes

A flashback scene exists to answer a question raised about a particular character in the prior scene. The scene is set at some point in the character's past and is pertinent to their history. It does not have to link directly to the main storyline. The GM establishes the scene as usual, establishing the setting, initial action, and which characters are present. Two things should happen during a flashback scene:

- The question should be answered
- The pertinent character should establish a single trait

It is permissible for other characters to establish traits as well if the GM feels it is appropriate. Usually a trait is established as a consequence of a major decision that the GM presented to the character during the flashback scene. Once the two main items have been accomplished, the GM should find a way to end the scene and pick a new scene. It can be a return to the scene before the flashback or it can be a completely new scene.

Traits

A trait is a brief description of a character and a die associated with it. traits are:

- Abilities
- Skills
- Back story
- Personality
- Advantages
- Weaknesses
- Resources
- Allies, Enemies or Rivals

The player has a choice of which die to assign to the trait. The choices are: d4, d6, d8, d10, d12 or d20.

Derrin's player gets a question about her fascination with the occult, and how it led her to learn about the curse of the Ancients. The GM frames a Flashback Scene that takes place in her freshman year when she first met Doctor Durnfeld. The GM decides to offer Derrin a chance to walk away from the dangerous life of an adventuring archaeologist. In about ten minutes of roleplaying, we learn that Derrin has a problem with authority. On Derrin's character card, the player records "Problem with Authority" and chooses d12.

Calling for a Roll Off

Whenever a player interacts with the world outside of their own character, the GM can call for a roll off. Only do this if it seems there are interesting options available for failure. Whenever a player tries to do something to another player's character, that other player can allow it or call for a roll.

There are always exactly 2 sides to a roll off. If the GM is one of the sides, the pool of dice they roll is determined by how formidable the GM judges the opposition to the player's actions to be.

- Easy opposition – 2d6
- Standard opposition – 2d6 + d10
- Stiff opposition - d6 + d10 + d12
- Imposing opposition – d6 + d12 + d20

Players determine which dice to roll by following this procedure:

- Start with a "free" d6
- The player goes through the character's traits and selects two traits they think apply. With the GM the group then discuss and decide if these traits are appropriate.
- The dice associate with the selected traits is added to the dice pool.

Derrin is being questioned by local law enforcement and she wants to avoid being asked uncomfortable questions. The GM calls for a roll off. The GM decides that the inspector is a Standard opponent and so rolls two 6-sided dice and a 10-sided die. Derrin's player starts with a d6 in their pool for free. Running through Derrin's traits, the player decides that Derrin's two word character concept "Mystic Archaeologist" does not apply, and so Derrin's player does not get the d10 for that trait. However, it seems that the trait "Problem with Authority" does apply and so the player adds a d12 to the dice pool.

A player may assist a side in the roll off if their character has a credible way to use one of their traits to assist that side. If the group decides to allow it, the player makes clear which side they are assisting and rolls their single trait die themselves.

Once each side has determined their dice pools, dice are rolled. The side with the single highest result wins and narrates the consequences. When the GM wins a good option is to present the player with a tough choice to explore the character's nature, morality, and motivations.

Example

Ajla's alien character Y'p'l'o is attempting to hide from some cyborgs. The GM decides they are stiff opposition, so they have a dice pool of d6 + d10 + d12. Ajla uses her character's traits of Camouflage (d8) and Doesn't Panic (d20) to give a dice pool of d6 + d8 + d20. The cyborgs roll 19 and Ajla rolls 13. The GM gives Ajla a difficult decision - the cyborgs have found her and want information. Y'p'l'o can either give up the information or suffer the consequences of silence. Ajla has Y'p'l'o give up the information and this decision and dice roll is marked down as the key moment of the scene.

Marks

For every die that rolls a 10 or higher, mark an X on the sheet on the character who rolled. For every die that rolls a 1, mark an # on the sheet of the character who rolled.

Once a character gets 5 Xs or 5 #s marked, the player should tell the GM. At an appropriate time, the GM will frame a dedicated scene in response. Once you get 5 Xs or 5 #s, erase ALL marks, both Xs and #s. If you get to 5 Xs and 5 #s on the same roll, it is treated as a 5 Xs result.

Example

Stine's character Tao has rolled a 1, a 5 and a 14 in her attempt to cut down the guards opposing her. Whilst it is a successful attack, Stine marks down on Tao's index card a # for the 1 and an X for the 14, as it above 10.

5X Scene

When a character gets a total of 5 X marks, the GM should soon find an opportunity to frame a Critical Dilemma scene for that character. The GM puts the character in a very complex scenario, full of difficult decisions and with no clean way to win. Depending upon the events of the scene, the player should do one of the following to the trait with the highest-sided die associated with it. (Choose in case of tie.)

- The character turns away from that trait. Cross it off and create a new trait that represents the new path the character is following
- The character re-evaluates that aspect of themselves. Assign a new die to the trait, no larger than d10.

Example

Myron's character has been lucky enough to get 5 Xs. His character Detective Smith was closing in the triple shoe killer. The GM frames a scene where Smith is on stakeout and has to make a decision. Does he stay in the car and keep watch or step out and prevent a violent mugging? If he stays put the mugger will seriously hurt their victim. If he blows his cover by going out, the killer will likely see him and react nefariously. The

choice is the key moment of the scene. As a result of choosing to stay in the car, Myron decides that Smith is turning away from his trait Serve the People and gives him a new trait of Target Fixation.

5# Scene

When a player gets a total of 5 # marks, the GM should soon find an opportunity for a Success Scene for that player's character. The Success Scene should feature the character achieving tangible success toward their personal goals or a satisfactory resolution an existing complication. There should still be roll offs, but the results will be framed in terms of degree of success rather that failure vs success. Depending on the events of the scene, the player will do one of the following (choose in case of tie).

- The character rededicates themselves to an existing aspect of themselves. Change the die associated to the lowest trait to anything you like.
- The character discovers a new goal or aspect of themselves. Create a trait with any die associated with it you want.

Example

After a run of bad luck, Lady Elizabeth now has 5 # on her character sheet. Good fortune now comes her way as she has been invited to a grand ball at the King's Estate. This will be an ideal opportunity for her to press her claim to her late brother's estate with all the important nobles of the land. Even if she gets only a few to listen to her, the gossip generated will surely influence the King's later judgement. The GM has framed a scene where it is highly like that Lady Elizabeth will make progress towards her goal, but the degree of success is still variable. Lady Elizabeth's lowest trait is her fame. Her player increases the die associated with the trait from a d4 to a d10.

Time Control

Not constrained by the causality of the story the players, the cinniúint, can go back in time and change key moments. They cannot go back in time further than when they first started to pay attention to their character. This means they cannot affect scenes set before the first scene.

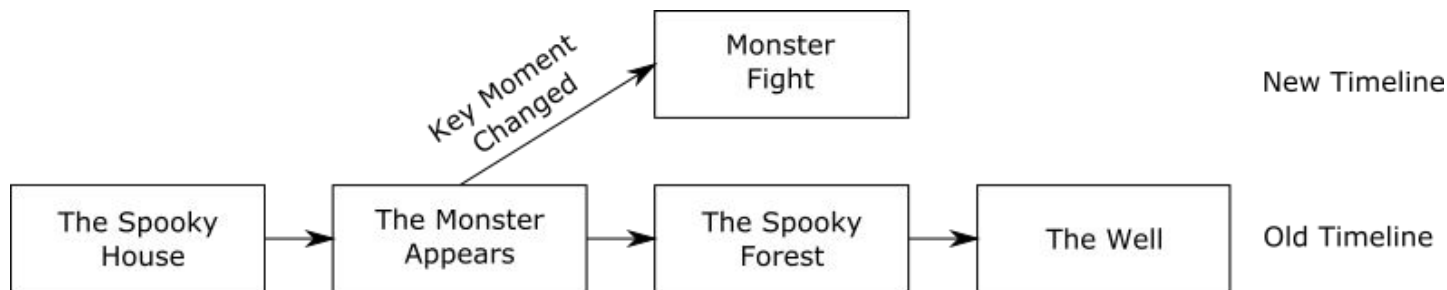
After a scene has finished, any player who has 5# can instead chose to go back to a previous scene and change it. This change is limited to taking the result of the key moment and changing it. This could be by changing the roll result, altering success to failure or failure to success. Rerolling a dice result can be done to any character. For their character only the player may change a choice that the character made such as the penalty for a failed roll or an important narrative decision. The GM should note the change on the affected scene.

Multiple Continuities

The change of a scene's key moment results in a new timeline that splits off and starts from the altered scene. The GM then calls the next scene based on upon the new resolution of the altered scene and the story continues. Preserve the old timeline and place the new timeline alongside it. A character's traits and back story are unaffected by the changes in timelines. Only the players are aware of the changes, their characters are not. The players should make use of their greater meta-information about the narrative to push characters towards their fates.

Example

Raija's character has 5 # marks. She goes back to a scene where cheerleader Tammy chose to run into the woods to escape the monster chasing her. Raija changes the key moment to Tammy instead turning and attempting to fight. Raija is intending to make it easier for Tammy to meet the fate Got the Glory in this new timeline. The GM starts the new timeline with the next logical scene. In this case, it is the fight with the monster.

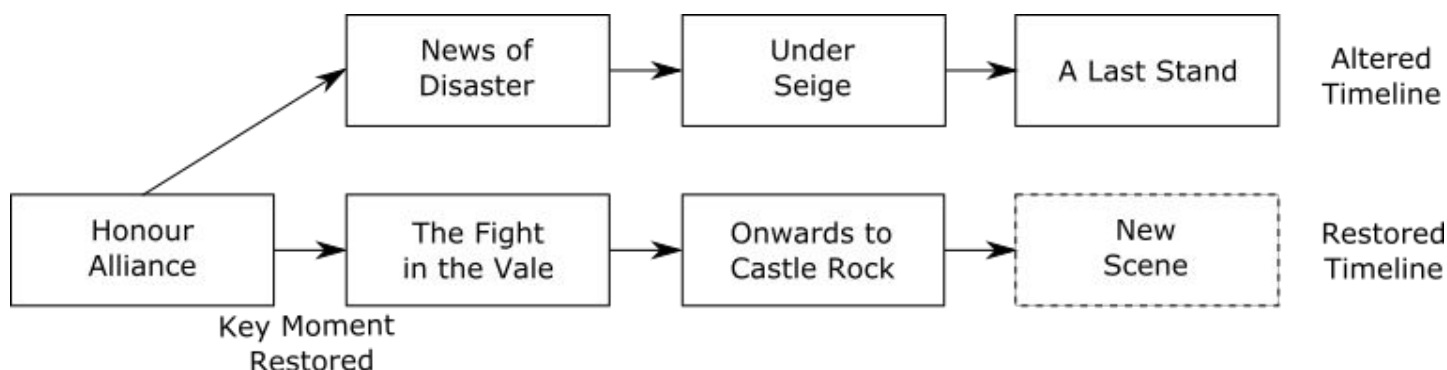


Reversion

Should another player go back and change an already altered scene, they have two choices. They can change the result further and create a new timeline. Or they can revert the change and restore a previous timeline. Should that happen the story moves forward along the old timeline, with the GM framing the next scene after the last scene on that timeline.

Example

After an alteration to King Morgan's decision to honour his ally's call for aid, Murjanah has decided to use the 5# of his character to undo the change, as it has lead to a disaster that does not help his character Sir Gabrijel meet his fate of Bountiful Treasure. The next scene now takes place after the last scene of the restored timeline, picking up where it left off.

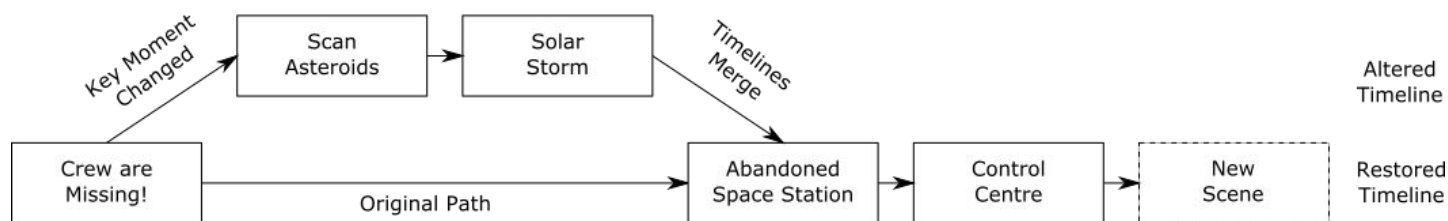


Merging Timelines

It is possible for different sequences of scenes to lead characters to the same destination. With the agreement of the group, the GM may declare that the current timeline has reconnected with a previous one. Alternatively a player may force the matter. This is done by altering a key moment in such a way that it brings the narrative back to a previous timeline at a later scene. The story then moves forward along the timeline, with the GM framing the next scene after the last scene of that timeline.

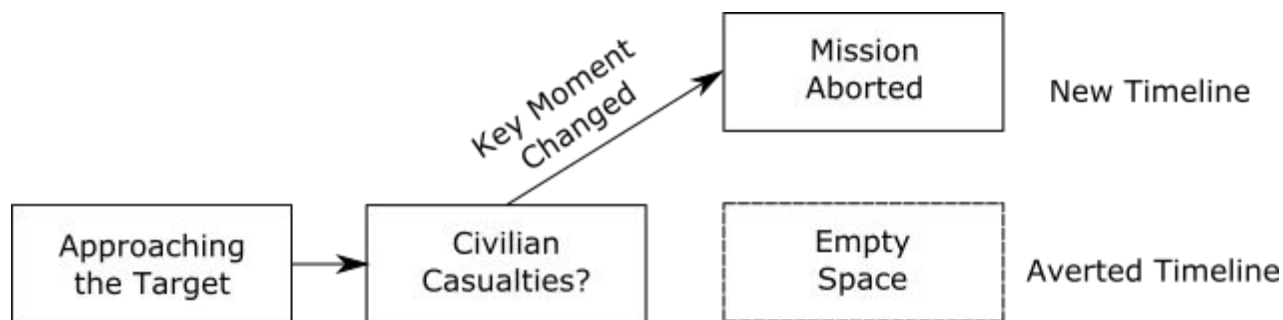
Example

After Heliena made a change Captain Orellana's decision on where to search for her missing crew, the party explored instead the asteroid field first. With them still going to the space station later, the GM has decided that what has happened in the asteroid field has no affected what happened before. He then merges the timeline back in and the next scene is placed at the end of the timeline.



Immediate Changes

Should a player decide to change the result of a scene that has just been concluded, they may do so. The GM should leave the space where the next scene in that timeline would have gone empty. Layout the index cards of the new timeline as if the averted timeline was there.



Meeting Fate

When a player completes a fate, they should draw a new one fate for their character. Completed fates are marked with a * and the identifier of the scene it was completed in. Should the timeline change to undo the completion of the fate, mark the fate with an + to indicate that it was once completed but is now undone. Over the course of the game it is possible that a fate may gain several * and + as the timelines change. Do not return any drawn fates.

Example

*With his character Trevor reuniting with his high school sweetheart, Giuliano has completed the fate Return of an Old Love. He marks that fate with a * and notes it was achieved in scene B12. He draws a new fate, this time Unseen Kindness. In working towards their fates, Simoneta alters the timeline so that Trevor never meets his sweetheart. Giuliano then marks Return of an Old Love with a +, noting it is no longer in the current timeline.*

If a short session or campaign is desired, then a good ending point for the game is when the group has four completed fates. For longer games a good ending point would be when all the fates have been completed. If competition is desired, the first player to complete have 5 * on their fates is the 'winner'. An alternative is the 'winner' is the first player to have three fates all complete at the same time.

Death of a Character

Should, in meeting their fate or otherwise, a character die then the player should take a new index card and begin a new character. The player keeps their fates which they must now work towards with the new character. However, this death and the new character's introduction are bound to this timeline. Should the timeline be changed so that the scene or death does not occur, the killed character returns. The new character is put to one side, left in narrative limbo unless their timeline is restored.

Example

Dr Thompson, despite many attempts to leave the city, has drowned in the rising flood waters. Havasi then has to start a new character, going with Mrs Edith Bloom a Retired-Teacher that the party meet in the next scene. When Kimberly alters the timeline so that party don't go to the suburbs and instead go uphill, Havasi returns to playing Dr Thompson, as in this new timeline he isn't dead. Edith is left behind with the abandoned timeline.

Acknowledgments and Influences

Stage 1 Designer

Stage 2 Designer

Microscope

Chrononauts