

## **A Hard Goodbye**

### **Overview**

A Hard Goodbye is a collaborative crime drama played in three acts. The game is about people living dangerous lives, stuck in a vicious cycle of regrettable actions and spilled blood. It is also about the Organization that the characters serve, and the people who want to free them from this life of violence.

In Act One, we get to know the PCs by seeing what their life is like in the organization. We learn more about their Hooks and their Outs. Hooks give a sense of why the characters have stuck with the Organization. Outs are the people who give PCs a reason to get out of the Organization before it's too late. Act One culminates in a tipping point for each PC -- a concrete action that catapults them into the most important decision of their lives.

In Act Two, we turn up the heat. PCs have to choose sides as the actions from Act One come to a head. As the Organization puts pressure on the PCs to uphold their vows, the Outs promise escape and peace. Act Two ends with each character's fate made clear: freedom, death, or resignation to a life of crime.

Act Three is our epilogue. We learn about the ultimate results of Act Two's climax. PCs, Outs, and the Organization itself all receive closure in Act Three.

### **What You Will Need**

A Hard Goodbye requires the following:

- 3 or 4 players, yourself included
- Pencils and paper
- Ten black and Ten red 6-sided dice (other colors will work -- just make sure the colors are easily distinguishable from each other)

### **Creation of the Organization**

Everybody begins the game by working together to create an Organization that they can really care about. Think about what makes you scared, sad, or angry. Make sure that you can't mistake the Organization for a good thing -- it is a human gristmill that takes in people and grinds them down to bones and blood for its own selfish wants.

Next, everyone should decide on the setting for the game. You might play in the world as we know it; a cyberpunk dystopia; a darker take on Sherwood Forest.

Once you have agreed on a setting, get everybody on the same page by establishing your Organization's Modus Operandi. This is the primary way in which the Organization rears its ugly head. Some examples include:

- Harassing and buying out poor residents to get property for cheap
- Recruiting terrorists through underground fighting clubs
- Blackmailing politicians to gain power in the city council
- Making a shipment of expensive cars disappear in 60 seconds
- Assassinations for the highest bidder

Next, come up with a Threat to your Organization. A Threat could be any outside groups that actively try to harm the Organization's business or even its very existence. Some sample Threats include:

- Government bodies like police, investigative bureaus, or zoning boards
- Other criminal organizations like rival gangs, old-blood mobsters, or trouble from overseas
- Social change like proactive citizens, better drug education, or rampant poverty

Come up with a brief Vow that every member swears when joining the Organization. This may have been accompanied by a toast, a curtsy, or the intermingling of blood between slit palms.

Examples of Vows include:

- "Blood in, blood out."
- "We'll gut any sonofabitch in our way."
- "For the greater good."

Finally, assign your Organization its two Attributes: Stability and Power.

Stability represents the Organization's ability to keep its inner turmoil under control. If this stat ever becomes 0, the organization collapses completely. Power represents the ability of the Organization to threaten and act based on raw resources. Divide twelve points between the two Attributes, with a minimum of 4 points in each.

The attributes will say a lot about your Organization -- low Stability and high Power might mean that the Organization is on the ropes, lashing out with brute force to make up for poor leadership, while one with high Stability and low Power might be growing its outward-facing legitimate businesses, restricted in its actions by heightened public attention. Talk about this with the rest of the group to help paint a clear picture for everyone.

## **Character Creation**

Characters in A Hard Goodbye are made of several components:

- A Hook: This is what the Organization holds over your head.
- An Out: This person represents your escape from the Organization.
- Three Attributes: Fear, Determination, and Trust.

To create a character, first think of a High Concept. This should be no more than a few words. You might be “The Getaway Driver,” “The Vicious Wetworker,” or “The Boss’s Daughter.” Hell, maybe you’re “The Boss.” Think of anybody with deep ties to the Organization and the way that it operates.

Next, give your character a Hook. This is the deep-rooted hook that the Organization has you on. Think of something that is hard to shake. Your Hook might be “My sister’s medical expenses,” “an outlet for my aggression,” or “a place where I belong.”

Your Out is the person who can turn this all around for you. Think of who the Out is and what they represent to your character. It might be “Frankie, the doctor who found me bleeding in the gutter,” “Julia, who wants me to leave the syndicate to elope with her,” or “Betty, who I took in when her parents were murdered.”

Next determine your character’s Worst Fear. Pick something more creative than death that the organization can inflict upon you. Your Worst Fear can involve you directly, your Out, or your Hook if it involves a person.

Finally, assign your Attributes. You have 7 points to divide between Determination and Trust with a maximum of 5 points and a minimum of 1 point in either Attribute. Your Fear is equal to the difference between the two. This will result in a Fear score of 1 or 3.

- Determination represents your will to act against all odds. Characters with high Determination will take heavy risks in order to escape the circle of violence, or to brutally get the job done.
- Trust is the reputation the character has gained in the organization. Someone who does their job well, knows the right people, or can’t afford to mess up will have a high Trust score. If at any point in the game a person’s Trust score drops below one, they will fall under Suspicion. Characters under Suspicion run a risk of their Worst Fear coming to light.
- Fear is the level of apprehension you have about acting in your own best interest instead of the Organization’s. You might be worried about what the Organization will do to you or your loved ones, or you might be concerned about betraying the people whose trust you’ve earned.
  - Suspicion and Worst Fear  
If at ANY time a character’s Trust drops below 1 either during their own conflict or through being involved in another player’s conflict event, then they instantly fall under suspicion. The player immediately makes a roll of determination + Trust (even if it is negative) vs. power. If the player loses, then their Worst Fears will come to light during Act 3. More on dice and rolling under Act 1.

If you haven’t yet, give your character a name and think a little about what they look like. Once everybody has ironed out the nitty-gritty details, go around the table to introduce yourselves. You are ready for Act One.

## Act One

In Act One, we get to know the PCs and their current situation. Each character will be given an assignment by the Organization. This is a chance to play to discover. Ask each other questions about your characters, the Organization, your Hooks and your Outs during this part of the game.

Begin by giving an Assignment to the player to your left. Your goal is to help them come up with an interesting moral dilemma to frame the start of the game. This should be an open conversation -- ask questions about the character, and what direction the player might want to take the story in. The player has the right to veto an assignment if it isn't something that interests them.

Some examples of Assignments include:

- Kidnap the mayor's daughter
- Run a rival gang out of town
- Get a shipment of guns across the border

Once everybody has an Assignment, pick a player to take the first turn. This is the current Active Player. The Active Player gets to set the pace for their scene, calling on other players to take the roles of various NPCs as needed. You can call on players to act as their own characters, as Outs, as representatives of the Organization, members from the Threat, or other meaningful people to interact with.

As the Active Player, your goal in Act One is to drive your character headlong into a moral dilemma. This can take one of three forms:

- The Assignment itself
- Connecting with your Out
- Confronting another PC

You have a lot of narrative power as the Active Player, but you can delegate that as much as you please. For instance, if you want the scene to focus on taking on your Assignment, you could consult the player to your right to help you steer the scene.

When you have identified your interesting tipping point, it is time to break out the dice and have a Conflict. Each conflict is listed as [Attribute A] versus [Attribute B], with some using multiple Attributes. Take a number of black dice equal to the Attribute(s) listed before 'versus.' This is representative of what your character is attempting to do. Then, take a number of red dice equal to the Attribute(s) after 'versus.' This is your opposition in the form of your inner turmoil, resistance from other characters, or the power of the Organization itself.

Roll all the dice you picked up and then organize them from highest to lowest. Compare the highest black result to the highest red result, then compare the next highest, and so forth, proceeding in descending order. Count up each success for both black and red. Discard ties. If there are any extra dice on one side, those dice are added to that side's success total. For example: black has a total of 3 dice and red has a total of 2. Instead of rolling the one extra black die, it is added directly to the success total for black.

You can add a +1 to your success total by bringing your Hook into your Conflict in a meaningful way. Examples of invoking Hook include:

- Discovering that your Out can provide for your Hook in a way that the Organization can't
- Taking on an Assignment related to your Hook
- Being frank and open with another PC about your Hook

You are only allowed to invoke your hook for a +1 success one time.

Alternately, you can gain a +1 to your Fear to reroll one die of your choice (black or red) and you must keep the second roll even if it results in a tie. You can choose to gain a reroll this way once during Act 1 and once during Act 2.

If you encounter a tie, then the side which has the most extra dice (dice that went straight to the scoring total and were not compared) then that side wins. In the case of a tie between an equal number of dice, simply roll all dice again.

After determining success or failure, explain to the group what happened to your character. If you chose to take on your Assignment and failed, what went wrong? If you confided in your Out and succeeded, what did they do that helped to steel your resolve to leave the Organization? Roleplay this out just as you did the opening until you feel you have come to a natural conclusion for your section.

Finally, record the Effect of your Conflict. Each conflict has a listed Effect for success and for failure. This is a permanent change to your character, the Organization, or another PC.

## **Act 1 Conflict Types**

### **Doing the Job Right**

You're going to get this job done. There's no turning back now. The terror of what will happen if you fail is a constant buzz in the back of your skull.

Roll: Fear versus Determination

Effect: If you succeed, take +1 Trust. The Organization gains +1 Stability. If you fail, take +1 Fear and -1 Determination.

### **A Way Out**

You take some time to get in touch with the person who can take you away from all this.

Roll: Determination versus Trust + Fear

Effect: If you succeed, take +1 Determination and -1 Fear. The Organization takes -1 Stability. If you fail, take -1 Trust or -1 Determination, your choice.

### **Opening Up**

It's too much to take on your own. You open up to somebody else within the Organization at your own risk.

Roll: Your Trust versus the other PC's Trust + Fear

Effect: If you succeed, take +1 Trust and -1 Fear. If you fail, take -1 Trust and +1 Fear.

### **Informant**

You've decided to secretly let a piece of evidence fall into the hands of the Threat.

Roll: Your Determination – your Fear vs. Power

Effect: If you succeed, the organization receives -1 to Power and -1 to Stability. If you fail, -1 to Trust +1 to Fear.

### **Drink to Forget**

You self-medicate to get through the day. Every day.

Roll: determination vs. fear

Effect: If you succeed – 1 fear, + 1 determination. If you fail, +1 fear, -1 Trust

### **Remembering a Friend**

You visit the grave, resting place, or location of the death of a former friend or Organization member.

Roll: Determination vs. Stability

Effect: If you succeed +1 Determination, +1 Trust. If you fail, -1 Determination, +1 Fear

## **Russian Roulette**

You decide to take living on the edge up one notch. You pull the trigger (or contemplate killing yourself with a weapon appropriate to the era) but it doesn't come to fruition. What effect does it have on you?

Roll: Determination - Fear vs. Fear

Effect: If you succeed, -1 Fear +1 Determination. If you fail, +1 Fear -1 Determination.

## **Wrapping Up Act One**

After everybody has completed their Act One scenes and conflicts, consider your current stats and the results of your Conflicts. This should paint a clear picture of the direction your character will be headed in with Act Two.

## **Act 2**

Act 2 involves a shakeup in the Organization.

If the organization has a low Stability then the conflict is internal. If it has a low Power, then the problem has been caused by the external Threat determined at the beginning of gameplay. If Stability and Power are equal, then roll off in the same manner used to determine conflicts with black representing Stability and Red representing power. The higher of the two wins. In the case of a tie, roll again.

Once the threat has been determined to be either internal or external then the players should hash out the exact cause of the upset. Perhaps one of the lieutenants has finally made a move for power and has spoken out against the head of the Organization or even attacked him. Maybe someone has broken off from the group entirely. Maybe the police have made someone talk or a rival organization is encroaching on your territory in a way that could seriously undermine all of your hard work. The Organization will be expecting the players to uphold their word and prove their loyalty.

Once again, each player will go around and be handed an assignment that potentially takes into consideration the Conflict. It might be to assassinate the leader of the splinter group or to kidnap the police chief's infant son or maybe they need to make all the stolen goods 'disappear.'

The Active Player should consider ways to bring their Outs and the Threat into play during their session, especially if neither made an appearance during Act 1. Just like the previous act, it is up to the Active Player to set the pacing.

Once again, think of how your player will act based upon your current stats. Players with a high determination and low fear may choose this time to cause a disruption or perhaps even bring down the

organization to help ease their escape. Players with a lot of trust and high fear may have decided that it's simply too risky to try and escape and this is the hand they've been dealt in life.

## **Act2 Conflict Types**

Because of the current state of affairs in the organization, everyone is under heavy scrutiny. Therefore any failure has a chance of being a critical failure. Critical failures occur either if you have no dice to roll that round or when you fail, your highest roll is equal to or lower than your fear. During Act 2, players will get to experience 2 Conflict Types. Players should each go through two role playing scenarios this time around. One of these should include the assignment they have been given. The other can be any type of event they wish to explore. Both of these events should include one of the below conflict types.

### **Power Play**

You are either too loyal or too scared to mess up the crucial assignment the Organization has given you. If you succeed it will prove the Organization still has teeth.

Roll: Trust + Power vs. Determination + Fear

Effect: If you succeed: +1 Power, +1 Stability, +2 Trust. If you fail: -1 Trust, -1 Power

Critical Failure: -1 Trust, -1 Power, -1 Stability

### **Accuse Other Members**

You accuse another player for having a crucial hand in the recent upset in the Organization. The accusation can be driven by genuine desire to catch the culprit or as a distraction to take the heat off yourself.

Roll: Active player's Trust vs. opponent's Trust

Effect: The winner gains +1 Trust; the loser takes -1 Trust. The infighting in the organization cause - 1 Stability

Critical Failure: Trust -2

### **Restore Order**

You've come to the heavy realization that you'll never be able to leave. Because of this you feel it's necessary to try to regain a resemblance of order to the only life you'll ever know.

Roll: Stability +Trust –Determination vs. Both adjacent opponents' Determination – fear

Effect: If you succeed: + 1 Stability, +1 Trust, All other players +1 Fear. If you fail: -1 Power, -1 Trust



Critical: Stability -2

### **Exploit Power**

Power is a strong temptation and you see the recent upset as a way for you to gain a significant hold on the Organization. This avenue may prove a more secure future than leaving the Organization ever could.

Roll: Determination + Trust - Power vs both adjacent opponents' Fear + Trust

Effect: Win: Stability +1, Trust +1, Opponent's Fear +1. Lose: Trust - 1, Power -1, Opponent's Trust +1

Critical: Power -1, Stability -1

### **Inspirational Murder**

Someone in your Organization has become weak and it's the fault of an outsider. You decide to take care of this nuisance and bring your association back to dealing with the task at hand.

Roll: Trust + Power vs. Opponent's Determination + Fear

Effect: If you succeed: Death of Opponent's Out, +1 Trust, +1 Power, Opponent -2 Determination, +1 Fear. If you fail: Out lives, -1 Trust to Active Player, - 1 Stability.

Critical: Your Out comes into danger: Your Out is Murdered or Kidnapped, Opponent's choice.

### **Talk to the Media**

You've contacted a media outlet of some type about an important inner working of the Organization.

Roll: Determination vs. Power

Effect: If you succeed: +1 Determination, -1 Stability, -1 Fear. If you fail: +1 Fear, -1 Trust. Roll to see if your Worst Fear comes into play.

Critical Failure: Worst Fear automatically comes into play

### **Murder of a PC**

Someone has gone too far and it's time to make them pay. Right now while the Organization is distracted is the perfect time to settle your differences.

Roll: Determination + Trust vs Determination +Trust

Effect: If you succeed the player is killed. If they have any remaining actions during Act 2, this portion of your turn is considered to happen after all of their actions. If you Fail, -2 Trust, +1 Fear.

Critical Failure: You get killed in the attack.

### **Join Forces**

You believe someone else wants out as much as you do. Choose a player who also wishes to get out (you may ask freely if you haven't been able to determine other's desires) and set together a plan that will help rip apart the Organization or a plan that will help you escape.

Roll: Determination + Determination vs. Power + Fear + Fear

Effect: If you succeed: Both players +2 Determination, - 1 Fear, -1 Stability. If you fail: Both Players -1 Determination, -1 Trust, +1 Power.

Critical Failure: Both players -2 Trust

### **Bribery**

You have enough money to pay a top person to member of the organization to lie about your death.

Roll: Trust + Determination vs Stability + Power

Effect: If you succeed -3 Fear, - 1 Stability. If you fail -2 trust, +1 fear

Critical Failure: -2 Trust than roll to see if your Worst Fear takes effect

### **I'll Shoot My Way Out**

You decide to kill as many of the bastards as you can and leave a bloody trail to freedom that hopefully few will try to follow.

Roll: Determination vs Power

Effect: If you succeed -1 Stability, -1 Power, -1 Fear, +1 Determination. If you fail: -1 Determination, +1 Fear, -2 trust, and roll for Worst Fear

Critical Failure: You die during the attempt.

### **Act 3**

Act 3 is where it all comes to a head.

The first thing to do is to determine if the organization survives the recent upheavals. If the organization ends Act 2 with a Stability of 0 or less, then it's all fallen apart. How that happens should follow with the events in the game. If it survives, that should also be taken into account.

Next determine if players were able to get out. Even if the organization has fallen into shambles, there are still elements around which want to rebuild or start fresh and the players could

easily be dragged right back in. For characters actively trying to leave, roll determination – fear vs power + stability. If the player succeeds they found a way to get out of the organization for good. If they failed, they were stopped at the last minute; either through their lack of willpower and conviction or perhaps the organization stepped in with a particularly nasty move.

For players who decided to stay, if the Organization survives then you remain in its ranks, rising or falling in standing based on your decisions, but you're still in it for the long haul. If the Organization fell apart, then it's up to you to decide if you join up with a particularly strong or charismatic leader or if you want to take the mantle of leader yourself.

Every player should take one last turn as the active player to resolve this chapter of their life. Regardless of if you escaped the life or if you stuck with it, each player should have a moment with their Out, unless said Out is dead, then the player should resolve that part of their life as well. If a player character dies during or after the second act, then the active player should instead find a way to tell how this affected that character's Out from the Out's perspective or even the Hook if that better suits the player's narrative. Will you finally get to live the life you've dreamed of away from the violence and crime or will you lose the person you love because they can't cope with the fact that you've decided to stay on the dark path that damns your soul?

After each player has determined their individual fate, the group should discuss what happens to the Organization and the type of aftermath that was left upon the city or any other important person or group that came about through storytelling.

### **Adding Conflicts**

Players should feel free to create additional conflicts for use in the game. The current set was created to be generic so they could fit into any setting.