

Spiral Star

A game about exploring your emotions while at the mercy of callous and obscure supernatural forces

Basic Info

Spiral Star is a LARP for 8-12 players and one (or more) Moderator. It should take about four hours to play, including character creation.

Required Materials

Spiral Star takes place on a yacht with three decks. The play space should be divided into three discrete areas, each representing a deck. Floors in a house would be ideal, but three adjacent rooms will work fine, and, really, any space divided clearly into three areas (each capable of accommodating the entire group comfortably) will do.

A Moderator needs to print a physical copy of the three decks of cards – print the pages from 6 to 18 (pages 6 to 8, containing the Character Cards, should be printed twice), cut out the boxes and glue or tape them onto standard-size index cards. The Character Deck is used only once at the start of play – but the Emotion Deck and Event Deck should be on a Moderator's person at all times.

A few pads of sticky notes and Sharpies should be on hand to mark down changes to the environment.

Some method (such as lanyards) of visibly affixing players' Character and Emotion Cards to their persons is also recommended.

Procedures for Play

Before Play

There are some events in this game that should be kept secret from the players. It is therefore recommended that the contents of the rules and Decks be known only to the Moderator(s).

Clearly designate three areas as Lower Deck, Main Deck, and Sun Deck.

At the Start of Play

Moderator: Lead the players into the Main Deck, and say the following (you may add in bits for safety or orientation, appropriate to your particular group of LARPer(s)):

“Welcome to the motor yacht *Spiral Star*, property of Captain Mary Putney, the celebrated and reclusive fantasy novelist. You were all friends or acquaintances of hers at one time, but none of you has had much contact with her in the past decade. Tonight, however, was her fiftieth birthday party, and you received a calligraphy invitation to remote Lake Irene in northern Minnesota. Who knows how many people got invited; you are the only guests who showed up. Some of you knew her from college or school, some as family, some through fandom, and some professionally. It turned out that none of you was a complete stranger to the rest of the guests either; each of you is acquainted with at least one other party attendee.

“The party was enjoyable enough. After brief introductions, you all convened on the yacht, which she piloted out to the middle of the lake, where the real entertainment began. There was booze aplenty, and the food was of outstanding quality. A recreational substance or two may have been provided for your consumption. Mary herself proved to be an energetic if somewhat awkward host, and by the end of the evening, it was beginning to feel like old times.

“Then, at midnight, she gathered you all here, in the dining hall [*put down a sticky note labeled Dining Hall*] to cut the cake. As she blew out the candle, the boat’s engine turned off. Emergency generators kicked in, and light returned; you all saw Mary struggling to breathe. Some among you rushed to help her—but then small, downy white feathers began poking their way out of her skin, streaming out of her mouth and nose, even coming out of her eyes. In a minute or two, it stopped; where Mary was, there was now a pile of feathers.

“The boat would not start again, and land is too far to swim—would you want to, anyway? Cell signal and radio signal are dead. So here you all are, on Mary’s boat, witnesses to something very strange. What now?

“Let’s find out who you are. Pick a card from the Character Deck and read over it. It will instruct you on three choices to make: make them by marking your card with Sharpie. Come up with your own name, age, and pronouns.

“After you’ve done that, go around and introduce yourselves by the information on your card. Now, go around again, and pick another character to ask the question at the bottom of your card. If someone asks you a leading question, assume all information implied about your character is true.

“Next, everyone pick a card from the Emotion Deck and read it. Your card tells you three things. First, your current dominant emotion. As long as this is your Emotion card, this emotion should be present in your character’s actions and thoughts. You may feel other emotions in addition (humans are complicated, after all), but this one should always be present. If you find yourself alone for a moment, check back in with your Emotion card and re-center yourself there.

“Second, it tells you your particular Horrible End. If circumstances align poorly for your character, your Horrible End may trigger, and you will suffer the hideous fate described on the Emotion card you are holding at that particular time.

“Third, your card will grant you either a Power or a Domain. A Power allows you to bend the rules in a particular way, described on the card. A Domain determines an aspect of the setting over which you have narrative control. This may be a room on the ship, or some other physical aspect of the world; either way, if you decide a fact about the world within your Domain, you should mark it by putting a sticky note in an appropriate location.

“As long as you hold this card, its information applies to you. You will always hold an Emotion card; however, there are a few circumstances under which you will get a new one. There are some Events in the Event Deck that can change your Emotion card. And, if two players touch, they should immediately switch Emotion cards with each other. When you get a new Emotion card, read it. Its rules now apply to you. If your character dies, you still retain control over your Power or Domain. Use it as you see fit.

“We are almost ready to begin play! The game will end at sunrise, or if the players manage to reach other humans. The game will also end if all characters are dead. When certain triggering events happen, cards will be drawn from the Event Deck—this will cause things to happen in the game. Be warned!

“So, do you all know who you are, how you’re feeling, and how you’re going to die? Great. It’s 12:05 A.M., and Mary Putney has just turned into a pile of feathers. Go.”

Events

Some characters may have rules that can make players draw from the Event Deck. Have them do so, and read out loud what happens. In addition, there are a few other specific events that will cause immediate draws from the Event Deck. These are:

- The first time a character takes a swim in the lake, that player draws.
- If any two characters kiss, the one who initiated the kiss draws.
- If a character manages to get the boat started again, that player draws.
- If a character manages to communicate with someone off the ship, that player draws.
- Every hour of real time that passes, find someone on the Sun Deck and have them draw.

Drawing Cards

When a card is drawn from a deck during play, a Moderator should shuffle what is remaining in the deck. For Event Cards, one that was drawn should be placed at the bottom of the deck afterwards, once its effects have taken place. For Emotion Cards, place the card that the player was holding previously at the bottom of the deck.

Character Cards

Print out two copies of each Character Card to assemble a Character Deck of 20 cards.

Character: Religion

Name: _____ / Age: _____ / Pronoun: _____

Through religion, I am/was:
Mary's religious leader / Mary's godchild /
Mary's congregation member

My job is/was:
A religious scholar / A therapist / A fraudster

My sin is:
Lust / Greed / Hypocrisy

My question is:
Why did you leave me in times of trouble?

Character: Family

Name: _____ / Age: _____ / Pronoun: _____

As family, I am:
Mary's child / Mary's sibling / Mary's parent

My job is/was:
A librarian / A teacher / A nurse

My sin is:
Greed / Wrath / Dishonesty

My question is:
Why did I let you live in my house for half a year?

Character: Professional

Name: _____ / Age: _____ / Pronoun: _____

Professionally, I was:
Mary's assistant / Mary's editor / Mary's rival

My job was:
A horror novelist / A editor / A fantasy novel critic

My sin is:
Hate / Envy / Pride

My question is:
Why did you ruin my career?

Character: College

Name: _____ / Age: _____ / Pronoun: _____

In college, I was:
Mary's roommate / Mary's professor / Mary's lover

My job is/was:
A professor / A novelist / A trust fund kid

My sin is:
Lust / Wrath / Hate

My question is:
Why are you thinking of breaking up with me?

Character: Mentor

Name: _____ / Age: _____ / Pronoun: _____

As a mentor, I am/was:

Mary's literary mentor / Mary's life coach /
Mary's childhood friend

My job is/was:

An opinions columnist / A professor / A novelist

My sin is:

Pride / Envy / Wrath

My question is:

Why are you obsessed with me?

Character: Fan

Name: _____ / Age: _____ / Pronoun: _____

As a fan, I am/was:

Mary's fan club leader / Mary's oldest fan /
Mary's convention contact

My job is/was:

A retail cashier / An engineer / An heir to an estate

My sin is:

Sloth / Envy / Cowardice

My question is:

Why do you hate me so passionately?

Character: Tutelage

Name: _____ / Age: _____ / Pronoun: _____

As a student, I am/was:

Mary's favorite student / Mary's slowest student /
Just one of Mary's many students

My job is/was:

An electrician / A barista / A rising literary star

My sin is:

Sloth / Cowardice / Hate

My question is:

Why did you bring Mary and I closer?

Character: Fellow Hobbyist

Name: _____ / Age: _____ / Pronoun: _____

I met Mary through my hobby of:

Calligraphy / Sailing / Antiques collection

My job is/was:

A chemical engineer / A poet / A journalist

My sin is:

Greed / Cowardice / Sloth

My question is:

Why did you try to ruin my friendship with Mary?

Character: Old Friend

Name: _____ / Age: _____ / Pronoun: _____

As an old friend, I am:

Mary's family friend / Mary's high school friend /
Mary's English 102 classmate

My job is/was:

A housekeeper / A police officer / A banker

My sin is:

Greed / Lust / Sloth

My question is:

What were you thinking when you tried to stab me?

Character: Ex-Lover

Name: _____ / Age: _____ / Pronoun: _____

As a romantic partner, I was:

Mary's ex-boyfriend / Mary's ex-girlfriend /
Mary's ex-friend with benefits

My job is/was:

A sculptor / A painter / A musician

My sin is:

Lust / Cowardice / Sloth

My question is:

Why did you help Mary break away from me?

Emotion Cards

Print out a copy of each Emotion Card to assemble an Emotion Deck of 20 cards.

Emotion: Hope

Everything's going to turn out all right. You're sure of it.

Horrible End: Cast in Bronze

One second you're there, the next you're a statue. The yacht begins to tip!

Domain: The Party

What was the food? Was there music? A bar? Presents? You can't add people to the game, but pretty much any other entertainment is under your control.

Emotion: Anger

Something is irking you. Is your anger hot and loud or cold and quiet? Is it directed at anyone in particular?

Horrible End: Fire

You burst into goutts of bright red flame. This is sudden, and may seriously injure others if they are too near you when it happens.

Power: My Way

If you and another character disagree about a course of action, you may activate this Power to force them to go along with you. Then draw a card from the Event Deck.

Emotion: Desire

Whatever (or whoever) it is, you want it bad.

Horrible End: Human Magnet

All loose metal in the vicinity comes flying at you at incredible speed. If you are touching any metal part of the ship, you find yourself stuck in place there. Maybe you're not dead right now, but you won't last long. Hey, draw an Event card while you're at it.

Domain: The Weather

It's night. Otherwise, the elements are yours to control. Make it rain.

Emotion: Cosmic Awe

You and all other humans are powerless before the yawning eternities. You know that now. Wow.

Horrible End: None

If something triggers your Horrible End while you hold this card, you do not die. Instead, return this card to the Emotion deck and draw a new one.

Domain: The Telescope

There's a small observatory up on the sun deck. While you hold this card, what you say is true regarding the room, its contents, and what can be seen through the telescope. Souls, perhaps.

Emotion: Abject Terror

You are utterly overwhelmed by the awfulness of it all.

Horrible End: LUDICROUS GIBS

Combine the Horrible Ends you've seen into one spectacular death. If you haven't seen any, describe the most hideous and nonsensical death you can imagine. Witnesses are struck with Abject Terror until something happens that changes their Emotion Cards.

Power: Relentless Horror

If you say that something awful happens, it happens. But it must be spontaneous and unpredictable.

Emotion: Curiosity

You want to *understand* what's going on above all else. *All else.*

Horrible End: I Understand Everything

Suddenly you figure everything out. Your psychotic insight bleeds into reality around you and eventually destroys you. But others get a direct glimpse into your mind. Describe and act out what thoughts kill you.

Power: Hypotheses

You offer a hypothesis about what exactly is going on. It can be correct or wrong – if correct, draw an Event Card. If wrong, don't draw a card but everyone else thinks it's correct.

Emotion: Morbid Fascination

You think what happened tonight is *awesome*. Your excitement is disturbing and/or enraging.

Horrible End: Reenactment

You turn into feathers, just like Mary did. A witness of your choice gains an insight to tonight's events, now that they've seen this again. They offer a hypothesis for why all these horrible things are happening.

Power: Do It. Just... Do It

If someone hesitates to do something, you can urge them to do it. If they refuse, they have to draw an Event Card. Otherwise they must take action.

Emotion: Remorse

You really regret coming to this horrible party.

Horrible End: Time Distortion

Causality works weirdly around you and you die to something that hasn't happened yet. Show what *might* kill everyone on this boat.

Power: Bad Memory

You remember something differently. Others know this is wrong, but upon confirmation it turns out to be correct. Retconning is a dangerous technique, by the way, so you have to draw an Event Card.

Emotion: Inebriated

This isn't exactly an emotion. You are spontaneously inebriated by... something... somehow. How strange.

Horrible End: Liquefaction

Some clear fluid begins to leak, and then spew, out of your orifices. Rising pressure rips apart your body and, my God, tides of that thing pour out. Everyone in the same deck gets swept off and into the waters below.

Power: Anonymous Tips

You are allowed to hear what other players are saying across deck boundary and use that information. It's actually something behind your ears telling you things.

Emotion: Detachment

You are unfazed by what's happening. You just want to get through this.

Horrible End: The Solution

Your body slowly melts away like ice sculpture under the sun. After a gruesome but painless process, whatever remains of you is... just the right equipment to fix the yacht.

Power: The Scientific Method

You can say something someone says regarding tonight's events is patently wrong, as long as you explain why. If this conflicts with a Domain effect that makes a statement true, this one trumps that effect if you draw an Event Card.

Emotion: Resolve

Seeing as how everyone else are reduced to emotional wrecks, you reluctantly take leadership.

Horrible End: Nothing

A hole in space opens up next to you. There is nothing in it. Nothing after nothing comes spilling out. Nothing kills you. The first person to interact with that nothing draws an Event Card.

Power: Assurance

Choose another player. For a short while, they may act against their Emotion. Using this Power three times initiates your Horrible End. If others ask you to use this Power, you must use it.

Emotion: Denial

You won't accept what is happening right now. Nobody will make you. *Nobody*.

Horrible End: Ontological Fugue

You split off into your own universe. Everyone can still perceive you, but nobody can interact with you. What you do still triggers Events, though.

Power: Not Me

Should an Event or Power cause something to happen to you or make you do something, you can choose to refuse it. It happens to *two* other characters instead.

Emotion: Hypervigilant

You are extremely cautious about everything. You will not miss a clue. As a side effect, you are extremely irritable and jumpy.

Horrible End: Seeing the Unseen

You peer into the invisible. You manage to spit out a single-word clue of your choice before your brain turns to puree and leaks out of your ears.

Domain: Behind Me

Your domain is behind *you*. This does not apply to things your character can be directly aware of.

Emotion: Expectant

Something is about to happen soon. You are preparing for it.

Horrible End: Fell Mood

Your Horrible End does not end you – instead you end up slaughtering another character (or yourself) and making something useful out of the carcass. Using this bloody artifact can stop an Event Card from being drawn or Horrible End from happening once. When this happens, discard this Emotion Card from play and draw a new one.

Power: Two Minutes Later

You decide what *doesn't* happen two minutes later, though your character strongly believes it will. If you want to benefit from this again, draw an Event Card before doing so.

Emotion: Selfish

You will leave this mess. If no-one else does... That's too bad.

Horrible End: Black Hole

You suddenly shrink into a fleck of dust. Your death sucks a few things within the deck into the black hole of you. Choose a few sticky notes about material things and rip them up.

Power: My Pocket

You have something useful on you. Draw an Event Card if it's useful for everyone. If it's useful for only others or only you, don't draw an Event Card.

Emotion: Suspicious

You are sure *someone* on this boat is responsible for everything.

Horrible End: Deleted

One moment, you are there. The next, you are not. You spontaneously cease to exist. How bland! However, upon your Horrible End, you may use your Power without having to draw an Event Card.

Power: Why?

Draw an Event Card. Ask someone “Why?”. They explain their motive and the answer is telepathically and involuntarily broadcast to everyone on deck.

Emotion: Irrational Hope

Everything's going to turn out all right. You believe this despite evidence.

Horrible End: Beacon

Your eyes begin to glow. The light grows until your entire body emits fierce radiation. Unless someone throws you off the boat (requiring an Event Card), the entire boat and its people will burn in nuclear fire.

Power: What's the Worst that Could Happen?

You can permit someone to use their Power or Domain effect without having to draw an Event Card. Instead, you draw *two*.

Emotion: Nervous

You are deeply shaken by what's happening on this boat. You overreact to everything.

Horrible End: Starlight

If this Horrible End activates, you begin to run toward the sun deck. A beam of light from a distant star disintegrate you, leaving iridescent smoke. Everyone looks up... and the stars look very different. This Horrible End counts toward one drawing of the Spiral Star Event Card.

Domain: Above the Waters

Your domain is the space above the waters and beyond the yacht. Just what the hell would happen there?

Emotion: Calm

You are balanced and oriented. You might be the person required to resolve this situation.

Horrible End: Amusement

You laugh. You laugh so hard that you die from asphyxia. What an undignified end for someone who could have helped everyone. Remove this Emotion Card from play once this Horrible End occurs.

Power: Common Sense

After thinking deeply and silently, you use your common sense to look for a solution. After drawing an Event Card, you may ask a Moderator for a hint.

Emotion: Desperate

You want to bargain your way out of this mess. But with who?

Horrible End: Chosen

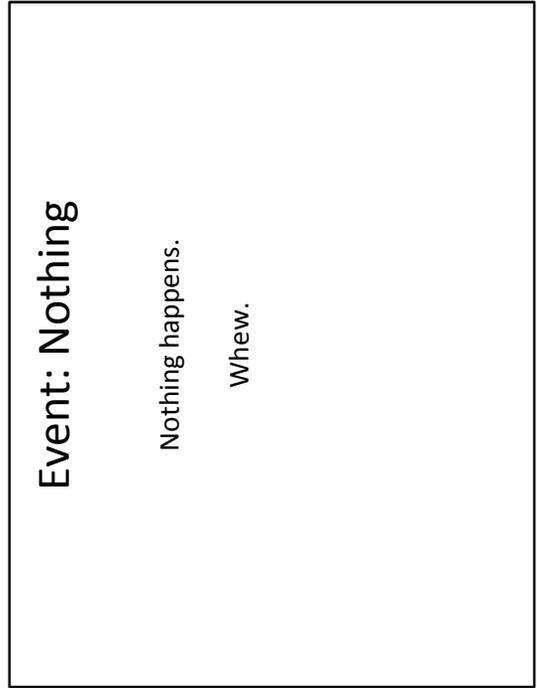
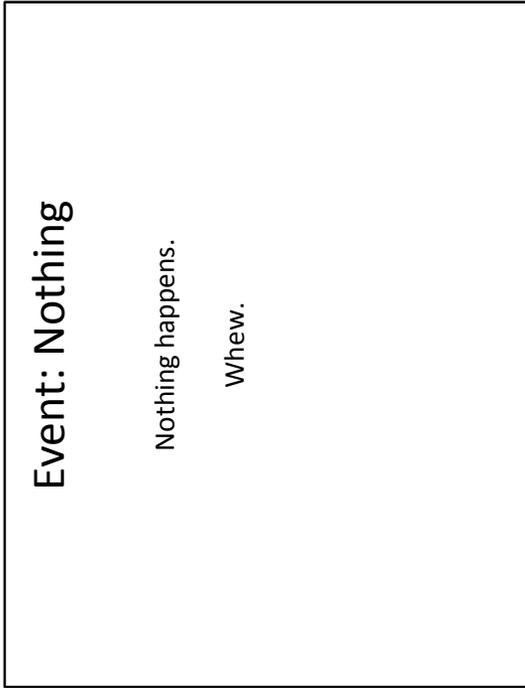
They chose you. You soar into the night sky like a bolt of lightning. If you were inside, you leave a burning hole in the ceiling. If it was cloudy outside, the cloud cover has been torn open. Now you are a Moderator!

Domain: Beneath the Floorboard

What's beneath the floor? Is something moving? Can you hear something? Is something hidden beneath, and why is it dangerous to crack open?

Event Cards

20 Event Cards assemble an Event Deck. Some cards are duplicated.



Event: Horrible Return

Choose a character who met their Horrible End.
They come back into existence.
But they are... changed.

If nobody has met their Horrible End yet,
shuffle this card back into the Event Deck.

Event: Horrible Ender

Choose another character.
Their Horrible End activates immediately.

Whoops!

Event: Courtesy Call

Choose another character.

Their cell phone rings. On the other end is a voice that
sounds exactly like yours, describing in excruciating
detail the worst thing you did to satiate your sin
(check your Character card).

Say what they hear.

Event: Horrible Ender

Choose another character.
Their Horrible End activates immediately.

Whoops!

Event: Change of Heart

Place your Emotion card at the bottom of the Emotion Deck and draw a new one.

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Event: It Was Made For Me

You suddenly realize something on the scene was *for you all along*, whatever that means.

If nothing comes to mind, you jump into the waters, chasing after a shadow shaped just like you.

Event: Signs

Something attempts to communicate to the characters on the current deck, directly to their mind.

Everyone on scene says the first word that comes to their mind. Try to assemble that into a message.

Event: Blink

You disappear from reality for a handful of seconds.

You are removed from play for that period of time, but a Moderator will give you a hint.

Event: Ghost Ship

The yacht suddenly works again, but nobody is steering it. It dies again soon, however.

If someone is in the waters, they get swept into the wake.

Event: Emotion - Treacherous

This is actually a secret Emotion Card. Hold onto your Emotion Card, but this card replaces it. Should you change your Emotion Card, put this card back in the Event Deck, then change your old Emotion Card.

Emotion: You decide to join the winning side.

Horrible End: None. Not only do you not die, you get to keep this card too.

Domain: The Engine Room. Lower Deck. Why isn't she running? You know, and you need to keep it that way.

Event: Emotion - Determination

This is actually a secret Emotion Card. Hold onto your Emotion Card, but this card replaces it. Should you change your Emotion Card, put this card back in the Event Deck, then change your old Emotion Card.

Emotion: You're going to get it done, god dammit.

Horrible End: Your teeth grow rapidly. Your bottom teeth pierce your skull within minutes.

Domain: The Engine Room. Lower Deck. Why isn't she running? You know.

Event: Spiral Star

You realize that the stars are moving.

Place this card at the bottom of the Event Deck.
When it is drawn again, repeat.

The third time this card is drawn, the game ends.

In the sky, all the stars are dancing in concentric circles.

Event: Emotion - Enlightenment

This is actually a secret Emotion Card. Hold onto your Emotion Card, but this card replaces it. Should you change your Emotion Card, put this card back in the Event Deck, then change your old Emotion Card.

Emotion: You are struck with an insight.

Horrible End: Your eyelids, lips, and nostrils meld shut.

Power: Nothing. You can't do anything. Deceive other players into thinking you can do something useful for extra fun.