

A Song  
Without End

A November Ronnies Entry  
Words: Soviet, Gun

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## Introduction

A Song Without End is a roleplaying game. This puts it in a category with such things as Dungeons and Dragons.

However, this game is very different from that. Instead of a single character, most players will have a family of characters. And in this game, instead of adventuring to earn their keep, the families have to deal with accusations from their community about their behavior, and whether or not they are being proper citizens.

In order to play, all you'll need, aside from at least one other person, are a handful of d6's and some blank paper.

## Setting

A Song Without End is set in a dismal neighborhood in Soviet Russia shortly after the end of WW2 in Europe. There are still jobs, certainly, but they are almost all working on assembly lines in brutal conditions for state factories. Marketplaces almost never have the goods that are required, and the lines when they do have something are astronomical. Families crowd into small spaces, many people sleeping in the same room. Some families aren't even lucky enough to have their own room. But they do have each other.

However, there are threats to the tranquility of this family life. Stalin is still the Premier, and his secret police are still arresting and murdering countless "traitors" to Mother Russia every week. And the voice that condemns you to them may be the voice that sings your praises from the room next door.

A Song Without End is about family, in horrid conditions, and the meaning of justice that arises, when one man has more power than he may know what to do with.

## Themes

The primary themes of A Song Without End are involved with paranoia, and a community's treatment thereof. All the players will be taking the role of a group of real people, and the game will track the relationships that develop and are strained amongst this small community.

The stress, of course, is introduced by The Man With The Gun, a character who embodies the fear and paranoia of the group. The Man With The Gun is the creepy, government sanctioned bogey man in everyone's closets, making sure nobody is being treasonous, and dealing with people who seem to be.

Part of the fear is the very simple fact that The Man With The Gun is human too, and he makes mistakes. Or, perhaps, he is malicious, so that the people he accuses are innocent. But, in any case, when The Man With The Gun takes justice into his own hands, the gun may not be aimed properly, and if it goes off, the results will not be good.

## Family Creation

Family Creation in A Song Without End is very different from character creation in many other RPGs, not the least reason for which is that each player controls a family, rather than just a single character. Each player, aside from The Man With The Gun, needs to make a Family.

### Rules about Families:

- 1) Each Family must have four (4) or five (5) people.
- 2) Each Family has one Family Member that is the Primary Member.
- 3) Each Family Member must have five (5) descriptors.
- 4) Each Family begins the game with 10 connections.
- 5) Each Family Member's Suspicion rating starts at one (1).

These rules, then, embody Family creation, but only in the very briefest sense.

To start, arrange the four or five dots on a blank sheet of paper. Spread them out enough so that you can right descriptions underneath them. Give each of these dots a name, and designate one of them to be the Primary Family Member.

Now, for each person who has a dot on the page, you need to come up with five (5) descriptors. The first descriptor should always be their relation to the Primary Family Member, if they aren't the Primary Family Member. After that, any short, one or two word phrase about the person in question is appropriate. Good examples could be: Factory Worker, Dissatisfied, Cheerful, Depressed, Manic. Anything much longer than two words should be distilled down into one or more smaller phrases.

After descriptors have been created for all of the characters, draw in ten (10) connecting lines in between the family members. After you've done this, you need to label each of these connections. These connections represent qualities of the relationship between the Family Members in question. Each of these connections should be labeled with another short phrase. An example would be, between a mother and her son, "Doting". Or, a farmer and his wife, "Neglect". So, not all of the relationship qualities have to be what we might call good.

Once you've done all this, make a note of each Family Member's Suspicion rating. Suspicion always starts at one (1).

That's it. All you needed to do to create a family for A Song Without End.

## The Man With The Gun

All but one of the players will be making Families. The remaining player will create, and represent, The Man With The Gun.

The Man With The Gun is meant to be a composite of all the archetypal secret police. He is suspicion incarnate. His job is to always be present when treason happens, always ready to pounce on the traitors and ensure their loyalty to Mother Russia.

### Rules about The Man With The Gun:

- 1) The Man With The Gun starts out with  $n$  bullets, where  $n$  is the number of Families.
- 2) The Man With The Gun is not a Family Member.
- 3) The Man With The Gun starts out with ten (10) descriptors, though there is no mechanical effect to them.
- 4) The Man With The Gun starts out with no connections, and cannot gain them through play.
- 5) The Man With The Gun may not be the accused in an accusation scene.

To create The Man With The Gun, start with a blank piece of paper, and write "The Man With The Gun" in the center. No name is needed, as he is meant to be a relatively inhuman force throughout the course of the game.

Next, write down ten (10) descriptors, much like you would for Family Members. However, The Man With The Gun should always have descriptors which are more appropriate to his character. Examples include: Secret Police, Dark Glasses, Permanent Scowl, Watchful Eye, &c.

Lastly, write down each of the Family Names along the side of the sheet of paper. Leave space next to each name for a check mark. These represent the bullets. For every Bullet Scene, one bullet must be crossed out, by crossing out the Family Name of the accused in the bullet list.

## Sequence of Play

In order to play A Song Without End, you will need a group of two or more players. One of these players must create The Man With The Gun. The rest of the characters should create Families. The rules for doing so precede this section.

Once The Man With The Gun and all of the Families have been created, play follows the sequence outlined below.

### Sequence:

- 1) The player to the left of The Man With The Gun frames a scene via accusation.
- 2) That scene is resolved.
- 3) Shift one player to the left and repeat the process.
- 4) When it returns to The Man With The Gun, he may frame a scene via accusation, or call for a Bullet Scene.
- 5) Repeat the cycle.

### Scene Resolution

A scene will always involve two characters. One of these characters is said to be the Antagonist, and the other is said to be the Protagonist.

To resolve a scene, once it is clear which character represents which role, simply do the following.

The Antagonist rolls a number of d6 equal to the Protagonist's Suspicion rating, plus one d6 if the scene was framed using one or more of the Protagonist's descriptors. Each die that comes up 5 or 6 is a success. The Protagonist rolls a number of d6 equal to the number of connections the Protagonist has on the Family sheet, with 5's and 6's still counting as success.

Whoever has the most successes "wins" the conflict, and is able to decide the specifics of how the stakes are applied (ie, descriptions on new connections, or which connection is lost, &c.). The other person, the "loser" of the conflict, gets to describe how this comes about through narration.

### Scene Via Accusation

Most of the scenes which are called for in A Song Without End will be framed by accusation. Each of these scenes are conflicts involving one specific Family Member. The accuser, of course, most likely wants to accuse a Member of a different Family, though they do not need to do so.

To call for the scene, the accuser should select one of their Family Members and describe, briefly, how that person is making an accusation towards the accused. An example: Nikolai says to his co-worker, Aleksander, "Why do you always come into work so drunk? It throws off the whole line."

This establishes a conflict. The stakes are only for the accused.

If the accused succeeds, they gain a connection to the accusing character. (See the section on gaining connections) If the accused does not succeed, then they are forced to lose a connection, becoming preoccupied with other matters.

Each Family Member involved in an accusation scene also raises their Suspicion rating by one (1) for each such scene that they are in.

Now, resolve the scene, with the accused as the Protagonist, and the accuser as the Antagonist.

### Bullet Scenes

If The Man With The Gun feels like it, he can, on his turn, call for a Bullet Scene instead of an accusation scene.

The declaration goes in much the same way, but the accusing character can only be The Man With The Gun, and the accused must have more Suspicion than connections.

Additionally, the stakes of the scene are simpler. If The Man With The Gun wins the scene, the accused Family Member dies, and all of their connections are severed. If he loses, the Family Member gains a connection.

Participants in a Bullet Scene don't gain Suspicion.

There is one major restriction on Bullet Scenes. The Man With The Gun has a number of bullets equal to the number of Families. Each time he calls for a Bullet Scene, one of these bullets goes away. Additionally, each Family may only be targetted by a single Bullet Scene over the course of the game.

And lastly, possibly most importantly, the Primary Family Member cannot be the target of a Bullet Scene.

## Appendix: Russian Names

Male:

Aleksei  
Aleksandr  
Andrei  
Anatoliy  
Anton  
Arkadiy  
Artur  
Artyom  
Averiy  
Boris  
Denis  
Dmitriy  
Eduard  
Evgeniy  
Filipp  
Georgiy  
Grigoriy  
Igor  
Il'ya  
Innokentiy  
Ivan  
Kirill  
Konstantin  
Leonid  
Lev  
Maksim  
Mark  
Mihail  
Nikolai  
Oleg  
Pavel  
Pyotr  
Sergei  
Stanislav  
Stepan  
Svyatoslav  
Timofei  
Viktor  
Vladimir  
Vladislav  
Vyacheslav  
Yaroslav  
Yegor  
Yevgeniy  
Yuriy

## Female:

Aleksandra  
Alina  
Alisa  
Alla  
Alyona  
Anastasiya  
Anna  
Anzhelika  
Dariya  
Dina  
Ekaterina  
Elena  
Elizaveta  
Evgeniya  
Galina  
Inga  
Inna  
Irina  
Klara  
Klavdiya  
Kseniya  
Larisa  
Lidiya  
Liliya  
Lyubov  
Lyudmila  
Margarita  
Marina  
Mariya  
Nadezhda  
Nataliya  
Nelli  
Nina  
Oksana  
Olga  
Olesya  
Polina  
Raisa  
Rozaliya  
Svetlana  
Tamara  
Tatiana  
Valentina  
Valeriya  
Vera  
Veronika  
Viktoriya  
Yekaterina  
Yelena  
Yelizaveta  
Yevdokiya  
Yevgeniya  
Yuliya  
Zinaida  
Zoya