

∞

Kirk Mitchell

Begun at 10:08 pm Wednesday 15th, EST... Ended at 9:50 pm Thursday 16th EST

Gun + Mud

Here?

Fading in too quickly, like a bad movie. I'm awake. Lying on my back in a softly grotesque bed sucked tight onto my back. Moving my arms to my head, a schlurp lets me know that this isn't a bed. I look around, the clumps of the ground stuck to my hair. This is a flat, empty wasteland. Dead trees stand solitaire in the distance. And everywhere. Everywhere. Its all mud.

Mud

No matter how you describe the wasteland that your character awakes to, the ground is always, always entirely mud. In essence, Mud is a measure of how muddy the wasteland is, but it is actually much more than that. Mud is a measure of how dangerous, how hostile, how malignant the wasteland itself is. A low Mud means that the muddy wasteland will simply hinder you, while a high Mud means that the wasteland will actively try and kill you. It will try and suck you down and smother you, and you will stay in the mud until your mud-choked corpse becomes just another patch host to the eternally dying flora of the waste.

Me ?

My attention focuses inwards, and as I crawl to my feet I stare at what little can be seen of my mud-spattered self. I'm wearing some sort of old and tatty three-piece suit. In my left hand is a large, silver, semi-automatic handgun. A quick check reveals that there is only one bullet in the magazine. Oh, and I have absolutely no idea who I am.

Characters awake, totally alone in the wastes.

Gun

My gun scares me. I can't keep it, but I can't let it go. So it just...hangs there in my hand. Flaccid. Like certain other things. Its big and shiny and I know...I just know that someday it is going to kill something.

Every character, no matter their description, has a gun. This can be any sort of firearm that can be carried on one's person, so that means no mini-guns or anti-aircraft guns or stinger rocket launchers. Pistols, sub-machineguns, machineguns are all ok. The gun is loaded with only a single bullet. No more bullets may be found at any point during the game. One bullet. That's it.

Longing

Walking. That's all I ever do these days. Nights. Whatever this fucking emptiness is called. The ground sucks at my feet as I walk, but it hasn't tried to kill me for days. Its biding its time. Time it knows is going to come... I don't feel anything now. Bright sunshine. Birds. Sex. Fighting. Love. I say the words but if anything was behind them it is gone. Even sadness is only a memory. Faded and cracked. Just this empty longing, gnawing at my chest. At my heart...if I even have a heart. Please (I try to cry, but even my tears have left me)... please...

The wasteland that is not the only empty thing. The wasteland mirrors the soul, or the soul mirrors the wasteland. Either way it may turn out to be, the characters have lost or are swiftly losing their capability to feel. They want it back. Longing is a measure of the intensity of that character's desperation to feel again.

Decide on how high you want your character's Longing to be, choosing a number between 1 and 20.

You?

For a moment there, I saw for the first time the only other living creature besides myself, ever since I came here. I can't remember not ever being here... It was large and bulky with flowing robes. It disappeared when I shouted at it, but my voice is so un-used that it was more of a croak. I wonder if I can even remember how to talk. I'll speak to whoever it is in the morning.

Eventually the characters discover somebody or something else out there in the waste with them. This can either be an individual or a community of people. People is really the key word, because out in the wastes what the characters meet can be anything: an alien, a business man, a puppet. The only defining item is that whatever or whomever they meet must be identifiably a person with human motives and emotions. The trick to this is to see if you can imagine how they would feel under different circumstances. If you can't, they aren't human enough.

Each community or individual is unique to the character that meets them, and are constructed during character creation to be specifically tied to that character.

One or Many?

The decision between an individual encounter or an encounter with a community will affect how the game plays out. An individual is just that, a single other person that the character will meet. A community counts as any group of people, from two upwards, that

have some sort of connection to each other, something that ties them together. Survival perhaps, mutual dependency, maybe just company.

Wish

She looked at me. Then she said "I wish my brother would die."

What all of these NPC's have in common is a single Wish. This is the one thing that they want and need more than anything else. This is the one thing that the player character that they meet has.

This could be something mundane and simple, like an antique pocket watch, but it is recommended that the mundane be sacrificed for something much more surreal and bizarre. Whatever it is, the player character does not want to give it up. You can explain this if you want, either beforehand or throughout play but it is not a necessary thing.

Wish is also paired with a number that signifies how desperate the NPC's need is for the Wish. Decide on how high you want their wish to be. Choose a number between 1 and 10.

When you want the NPC's to try and gain their Wish from the character, either you or the GM can declare a Wish scene.

Walking the Wastes

I've been learning a lot these days about how to survive. Its not like they say in the Boy Scouts Handbook or in all of those survival courses that they teach in Phys Ed. Scrounging for food isn't a problem, and neither is water. I don't seem to be hungry or thirsty anymore. No, the real trick is to keep moving so that the mud doesn't swallow you whole.

∞ is based around a conflict resolution system. Whenever a conflict arises within the game, all of its participants roll opposed pools of dice. It doesn't matter what kind of dice, so long as they are all of the same type. The pools are calculated and then rolled. The results of all of the dice are added up and the highest total wins the conflict.

Should your pool be calculated to be equal or less than 0, roll a single die.

The formula for conflicts is as follows:

Longing - Mud vs Wish

If you lose a conflict, your character will gain one Longing, your need to feel frustrated.

If you win a conflict, your character will lose one Longing, it is sated just a little bit.

Escalation

No matter what I do... NO MATTER WHAT I DO... It always just gets worse. Everything just gets worse. And the sad thing, the truly sad thing about it is... I can't cry about it at all.

After you have rolled the dice and the results of the conflict have been narrated, you must escalate the conflict further. This means that instead of just leaving the conflict where it is, you will increase the stakes and push things further and harder.

Every time you escalate, lower your Longing and increase one of the following Amplifiers...

Sex: Any sort of sexual interaction, escalating as follows:

Touch – Kiss – Sex – Rape

Violence: Any sort of rough or violent interaction, escalating as follows:

Push – Punch – Stab – Torture

Dependence: Any sort of addictive or dependant interaction, escalating as follows:

Experiment – Hobby – Addiction – Deadly obsession

All of the escalations given are merely examples to display how to escalate, but should it be known that they are not hard and fast rules. Feel free to add nuances and extra levels of depravity up to and beyond the examples given. If at any point you can't escalate any further, you will automatically lose the conflict.

Amplifiers all start at 1 at the beginning of the game.

When you escalate, roll for conflict again. The formula is slightly different this time:

Longing + (chosen Amplifier) - Mud vs Wish

If you win the conflict, describe an escalation of danger, brutality and depravity in the Amplifier you chose. If you lose the conflict, the conflict escalates, but against your character.

You must escalate as many times as equal to the value of the chosen Amplifier at the beginning of the conflict. After that any further escalations of that conflict are optional and you may take the conflict as resolved.

The Definition of a Conflict

A conflict is defined by a confrontation of intent, interests, a contest or an interaction with the potential to get out of hand. An argument, a mutual drug high, even beginning to make love is considered to be a conflict in ∞ .

Wish Scenes

Your character is not the only one who has something that they want, that they desperately, violently *need*. NPC's have their Wish staring them in the face and they are going to try and take it. That is what a Wish scene is, where they are going to try and take whatever it is that they so desperately need.

To initiate a Wish scene, quite simply declare it. Anybody can declare a Wish scene for the character currently in the spotlight, even if they are not in the scene. The Wish scene is the same as any conflict and any following escalation, but the results are slightly different.

If you win a conflict in a Wish scene, the NPC's Wish increases by one. If you lose a conflict in a Wish scene, you give up some what the NPC wants or go a step further towards letting them have it. Otherwise, the procedure and results are the same.

The Wish scene ends when the conflict is resolved.

How it ends...

He was on me, clawing at my face. My thumbs were digging into his eyes. He shattered my ribs. And she was there too. Clawing at him, at me. Lacerations crisscross whatever she touches. I can't lose it. Not now, not after I just got it back. Her chest is open, heart beating behind blood-flecked breasts. My gun is in my hand. Bang. Red drops splatter the sheets. Red rain streaks down the window. The mud will eat the corpse.

There is a single condition that ends the game. When one of the guns is fired. When somebody fires their gun, describe the immediate effects of the shot (who gets hit, if any, the expressions etc.), and then cut to the other characters. Sort of like a series of freeze-frames of what is going on at the instant the gun is fired.

Although you can try, nobody can die in ∞ unless shot.

Curtain.

The Waste and Its Inhabitants:

A Guide

Running ∞ is not like running other RPGs. Rarely, if ever, will player characters be together in the same place. The GM is in charge of scene-framing, so it is important to keep the game running at a tight clip, jumping rapidly from character to character. Use Wish scenes to force players to react, to force them and their characters into difficult positions.

It is very possible that you will deal with some extremely difficult and disturbing actions during the course of ∞ , including rape, molestation, torture, suicide and others. Thus, it is important to establish some ground-rules. Discuss as a group before you begin the game how far you are willing to go and establish some boundaries.

Obituary (Designer's Comments)

This is a game about depression.

During design and when I first got the idea, I was hugely influenced by Vincent Baker's *Hungry, Desperate and Alone*, as well as Paul Czech's *My Life With Master*. Also, I listened extensively to Pink Floyd, Godspeed You! Black Emperor and Marilyn Manson during design. I read altogether too much, and so the idea pretty much came to me when thinking about depression while reading Stephen King's *The Gunslinger*, one of the three *good* books in the seven book series *The Dark Tower*, and listening to Godspeed You! Black Emperor's *f# a# ∞* album. All at the same time. Throw in some Muppet action because I watch *The Dark Crystal* and *The Never-Ending Story* way too often along with some theories on depression and suicide sourced from Al Alvarez's *The Savage God: a study of suicide*, and you get the product you are reading right now.

Hopefully the game will have Lots Of Ore, be Unbaked But Tasty or maybe even be Not Quite Ripe But Really Juicy. I also hope that the game is not considered to be too derivative.

I plan on developing this game, whether there is any market for it at all. Profits will be donated to various children's charities.

What the game needs:

Some decent examples. This time I could actually think of them, but didn't have much in the way of time to implement them.

The game has a lot of holes that a more in-depth look could uncover, but at the moment I can't pick them up properly. Things that come to mind are the ways that the stats of the different characters fluctuate, because I don't know how well they will work out, as well as the fact that the how-to text is really quite patchy. The rules I think are functional but not particularly well explained or evoked.

Quite frankly, the game looks like crap. Formatting and Pretty Pictures, coming right up.

The use of Mud may seem a bit of a cop-out, but think *The Never-Ending Story* when you play it. Totally the Swamp of Sadness. Of course, it could also be something like the Bog of Eternal Stench in the Labyrinth.

Finally, I know that this isn't what depression leads to, but rather it is an attempt to express how it feels. If you want to shout at or lecture me, I can be found at the_guy_next_door@hotmail.com.