

Kristallnacht

a work in progress (unfortunately) by Walt Freitag

**If you should go skating on the thin ice of modern life,
dragging behind you the silent reproach
of a billion tear-stained eyes,
don't be surprised if a crack in the ice
appears under your feet.
You slip out of your depth and out of your mind
with your fears flowing out behind you
as you claw the thin ice.**

-- Pink Floyd, *The Wall*

In *Kristallnacht*, the emotions and values of a single main character become the field of contention between four to six players, as they competitively narrate the character through a dreamlike ordeal over eight fifteen-minute episodes, ending with a climactic trial that determines what the character gains and loses from the experience. A unique system links it all together without a gamemaster. Story elements that players create during the first seven episodes become physical cards playable at the trial.

Timescale: option #2 (one session of two hours)

Ingredients; package one, GLASS, COMMITTEE, EMOTION

What you need to play:

You need three, four, five, or six players (including yourself).

One of the players, called the Host, must do a few minutes of advance preparation. The others do not need to do any advance preparation.

Each player needs twelve dice. (The dice should be cubic in shape and have 1 to 6 spots on each side. If you needed to be told that, read the **red text** when you get to the next page. If you're wondering why anyone would need to be told that, read the **blue text** when you get to the next page.)

You will need a timer that can be set to make an audible signal after timing fifteen minutes, and that can be quickly and easily reset for the next fifteen minutes after going off. The timer must be placed out of view, so a purely visual timer (such as a sand glass) will not do.

The room where you play must be prepared so that there are no clocks visible. (Players must not wear watches or use any electronic devices that display the time or count elapsed time.)

Each player needs a pencil, and you will need a few dozen blank index cards or small sheets of paper. Index cards are better, because they will have to be shuffled once during the game. You can use the backs of old business cards, if the fronts are all the same.

You will need about 100 small tokens, and a bowl to put them in. Pennies will work just fine.

You will need the set of Image cards that came with the game.

What kind of game is this?

Kristallnacht is a game that, like many other games (such as poker), you play with other people using dice, tokens, and cards. There's also a game clock, which is unusual for games you play around a table, but not so unusual for games in general when you think about, say, hockey or football. Unlike most games, Kristallnacht asks you to imagine scenes in a story, and describe them to the other players, as you play. You and all the other players create a single story by committee. The dice, tokens, cards, and clock will tell you when it's your turn to add something to the story, and will guide you in deciding what to add. By adding to the story, you'll gain and lose tokens and create new cards that will come back to affect the game, and the story, later on.

The story is about a character who has something in common with you. In the story, the character goes through dreamlike or surreal experiences (think *Alice in Wonderland* or *Pink Floyd's The Wall*). This makes it possible to add just about anything to the story you want to, without worrying too much about whether it makes sense or whether it's "what would really happen" or whether it needs to be explained later. The character has something in common with you: a bad quality (something about the character -- or yourself -- that you'd want to change, such as being lonely or impatient or having a bad temper) and a good quality (something about the character, and yourself, that you'd not want to change, such as being loyal or honest or a good provider). Your goal in the game is to cause the character's bad trait to change, while preventing the good trait from changing.

Kristallnacht is a role playing game with several unconventional twists. There's only one "player-character" and that character is played by everyone, by committee as it were. The places, situations, and characters that the main character encounters, which in most role playing games are invented by a gamemaster (and usually in advance) are invented by the players during the game. A different player takes the lead "director" role for each episode. Players earn dice by spending tokens and narrating new characters and events into the scene, and the owner of the highest-value dice combination on the table gets to narrate the main character's actions.

The engine driving the story and the game play is a set of resource pools representing the main characters' emotions. The emotion pools are linked to the character traits that the players are trying to change or maintain; they're drawn upon by Directors when they create a new scene; and they're modified when players narrate a character action. In the final scene, characters and other elements created in the first seven scenes return as cards that directly assault the emotion pools as players compete to determine how the character has changed from the experience.

Kristallnacht

Within a few minutes of accidentally ingesting a minute dose of the synthetic neurotransmitter KR9900, I began experiencing an extraordinary hallucination, or rather I should say a sequence of hallucinatory episodes. Apparently, as best as I can determine from examining the aftermath, I remained seated and motionless during the entire episode, which lasted eight hours by the clock but only two hours subjectively, as I did no damage to my person or to my surroundings despite undergoing subjective experiences that at times involved vigorous and violent activity. The episode began in the late evening, and as the clinic was closed for the night, I was alone and undisturbed the entire time.

As far as I can recall, the very first hallucinatory sensation was a tremendous sound of shattering glass, completely without warning and intolerably loud. A moment later, the visual hallucination began in kind, as my view of the office around me appeared to shatter like a pane of glass. In alarm I realized that a brick had been thrown through the large window fronting my office facing the street -- though in fact my real office has no windows and connects only to a hospital corridor. "Outside" beyond the shattered glass was a nighttime street scene of shadowy running figures, confused shouts and screams, and as-yet distant fires. I soon recognized the scene from my grandmother's stories of Berlin on the tenth of November 1938, Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass. It was no doubt from these memories that my brain constructed the format -- though not, of course, the detailed content -- of the episodes that were to follow.

Almost immediately, a man broke into my office through the shattered window, and began shouting racist abuse at me. He was dressed in the garb of a brownshirt, complete with a swastika armband, and carrying a fire axe. His face and shrill voice were those of a recent patient of mine, at whose parole hearing I'd testified that his continued anti-Semitic ideation (including the full panoply of holocaust denial conspiracy theories) were indicative of a paranoid dissociative state rendering him not yet able to re-enter society. Shouting that he was paying me back for overcharging him at my stationery store (which my former medical office now seemed to have fully transformed into), he began smashing the store's fixtures, tossing boxes of ink bottles to smash on the floor, and toppling shelves. I made no response, and eventually he turned his attention toward me and threatened violence. I resolved to defend myself and grabbed up a chair to keep him at bay. A burning torch was thrown through the window, setting fire to scattered papers on the floor. Meanwhile, I had managed to catch my assailant's axe in the legs of the chair and was wrestling him for control of it. In the process his head was struck by the axe handle, hard enough to knock him cold. The fire was spreading, and the shouts of angry men were getting closer outside. I fled, leaving the man unconscious in the burning shop, but reaching the relative safety of an alley partway down the block, I changed my mind and resolved to rescue the man. Back at the shop, a gang of his brethren had arrived at the store and were already pulling him out to the sidewalk. They saw me and gave chase, and I fled again back toward the alley.

Fortunately the alley passed all the way through to an adjacent street, where I evaded my pursuers and hid, until another sudden crash of shattered glass disintegrated my hiding place and placed me suddenly in front of another broken store front. This turned out to be a

delicatessen, whose proprietor was my sister, who in real life succumbed to anorexia while I was barely an adolescent. She ignored my attempts to rescue her, and insisted on attempting to serve meals demanded by a queue of shadowy customers even as mocking brownshirts tauntingly grabbed away her utensils and defiled the foodstuffs in the store. With superhuman strength she resisted my efforts to bodily drag her out of there. When she began slicing her own flesh to fill sandwiches, I went berserk and drove the customers away with my axe. This, at last, got her attention; she looked at me in horror and fled; I tried to chase after her, but my chase was cut short when I unaccountably ran straight into a pane of glass, whose loud shattering heralded another change of scene.

Thus began a nightmarish odyssey that took me through increasingly vivid and surreal experiences. I will not relate all, especially as some of the occurrences were of an even more intensely personal nature than what had gone before. Various scenes included my parents, my wife and children, my teachers, my medical colleagues, and my patients; others were cast entirely with strangers but incorporated snatches of my past and present life. Each interval ended with the sound of glass shattering, which I attribute to the hourly chiming of the clock in my office, the only significant sound in the room, distorted in my perception by the effects of the drug.

The final episode was of a different character than the others. I had been completely caught up in the hallucination since shortly after it began, but by the end of the second hour I was becoming more lucid, beginning to remember who and where I really was. Nonetheless the hallucination retained its grip, and I found myself at last caught and dragged away by the brown-shirted figures from whom I'd been fleeing all along. The final shattering of glass placed me in a sort of interrogation room. The interrogators were not the Nazis alone, though they were present; most were the same people, friend and foe, whom I'd encountered in the preceding scenes. They ringed me, just outside the pool of light in which I sat, and from time to time this or that figure would loom closer and make accusations or ask pointed questions. Some accusations I denied; others I felt compelled to confess to. It was deeply disturbing but not, oddly, entirely unwelcome, as I was by then lucid enough to perceive that through this trial I would regain reality. At that juncture, what was true and what was not seemed hardly relevant. Did I really break my parents' hearts by marrying a gentile, and if so, is that my fault or theirs? Did I really tease my sister, when I was twelve and she was fifteen, about her figure? It all felt true, but not all of it was.

Though it would seem that any narrative ending with a trial (of sorts) must include a verdict, that is the one detail of the hallucination that I unfortunately cannot remember vividly, in fact, not at all. Two hours after that first din of broken glass, the midnight chiming of my office clock brought me fully back to myself.

Despite recent new evidence that KR9900 may cause personality changes, neurochemical sequale (so-called 'brain damage'), and even sudden death in rare cases, I don't believe I've suffered any long-term effects from my own ordeal. It's true that I no longer take pride in the prestige I've gained through my years of clinical practice, but is that not fully accounted for by the perspective of age and wisdom, and by the different nature of the new challenges I now face in my new career as an advocate for the rights of the mentally ill?

Eric Corson, M.D. Ph.D.

The story in the game does not have to be like this one. It certainly doesn't have to be in any way related to the Kristallnacht of history. But it will be about a character whose view of the world is violently challenged; a crack in the ice; a trip through a distorted mirror; shattered glass.

How To Play

1. The Host

Before the game begins, one player, called the Host, must make certain preparations.

1. Decide who the character is. Write down the following on a sheet of paper:

- The character's name.
- The character's gender and approximate age.
- The time and place the character comes from, including the character's general station in life, in a few words or phrases. Some possibilities might be "A London gentleman in 1880" or "a scavenger in the wilderness of post-nuclear North America."
- The cause of the character's Kristallnacht experience. Is it a dream, a hallucination brought on by a strange drug, a nervous breakdown, psychosis, a weird experiment conducted by aliens, kidnapped and sent to a strange island, or is it just everyday life in the world the character inhabits?

2. Choose six Emotions that will drive the story. All six should be distinct (so, if one is "Pride" don't also use "Vanity" even though there might be subtle differences between them). As many of the emotions as you want can be "bad" or "good" -- this will affect the tone of the game but not its playability. The possibilities include, but should not be limited to:

Fear
Love
Despair
Hate
Envy
Pride
Guilt
Anger
Joy
Longing
Happiness

Do not choose, as Emotions, things that are actually qualities or behaviors, such as Honesty or Procrastination. (Players can, instead, choose these as Traits when the game

begins.) However, some qualities, such as Curiosity, Faith, Humility, or Courage, might seem to be on the borderline between emotions and traits. Use your own judgment on these. Remember, though, that Emotions mostly direct the story and are variable; it's Traits that define the character's nature. Curiosity as an Emotion means that the character's curiosity will wax and wane, depending on what happens in the story. If you want the character to be innately Curious all the time, make it a Trait.

Write each Emotion on a separate card. These will be used during the game to mark the token pools for each Emotion. Shuffle the cards, and then number the cards in order from 1 to 6.

3. Prepare the deck of Image cards. As the Host, you're permitted to edit the Image deck to better conform to the nature of the Kristallnacht experience you have in mind. You might judge some cards more or less suitable for a story framed by Gothic nightmare, psychological experiment, or psychedelic 60s hippie odyssey. The host may remove cards or invent new cards and add them, and/or may use themed supplemental decks if available.

4. Gather the players, and all the other things on the *What You Need To Play* list above.

2. Setup

After all the players are gathered, but before the timer is started for the first scene, players must do the following.

1. Choose who sits where around the table. This can be done at will, or randomly if players can't come to an agreement. (Roll a die; highest roll chooses a seat first; reroll ties.) The seating order will affect play. Players keep the same seating order throughout the game.

2. Give each player 12 dice and 12 tokens to put in front of them on the table. Put the rest of the tokens in the bowl within reach of everyone. Each player should also have a pencil and two blank cards. Put the rest of the blank cards on a stack within reach of everyone. Put the stack of Image cards face down within reach of everyone.

3. The Host should introduce the character information created in advance, including the cause of the Kristallnacht experience.

4. The Host should place the Emotion cards face up near the center of the table, where they can be seen by everyone.

5. **Create Positive Traits.** Beginning with the player to the Host's left, and proceeding clockwise (so that the Host will go last), each player announces a trait that the player

“shares” with the character -- that is, the player claims to have the trait in real life, and the character in the story will have the trait also. This first round, the traits will be “positive” -- that is, the player wants the character to keep that trait unchanged despite whatever might happen in the story. Note that this doesn’t necessarily mean that the trait has to be a “good thing” in the eyes of society or even in the eyes of the character. It just means that the player doesn’t want it to change in the story (but, given the nature of the game, that also means the player should expect other players to attempt to change it!)

Traits can be any important fact about the character. Traits can include:

- Personal qualities such as honesty, innocence, courage, humility, strength, charisma, or idealism.
- Qualities of the character’s relationships, such as “loving husband,” “trusting friend,” “understanding boss,” “skilled teacher”
- Life roles that are particularly important to the character, such as “artist,” “collector of fine art,” “a good provider,” “avid environmental activist,” “eccentric inventor”

Traits can be as general or specific as a player wishes. Being more general or more specific gives a Trait advantages and disadvantages in play which will be discovered with play experience.

As players select traits, one rule must be observed that will continue to be important throughout the game: players may not directly contradict facts established already in the game, and this includes Traits already announced by other players. So, for instance, if one player has announced the Trait “a good provider,” another player should not announce the trait “utterly unconcerned with money.”

After announcing their first (positive) trait, each player should write it on one of their blank cards, along with a “+” sign to indicate that this is a positive trait.

6. Create Negative Traits. Following the same procedure, each player chooses a second Trait. This second Trait is “negative,” meaning that the player wants to cause this trait to change as a result of events in the story. This doesn’t necessarily mean that the trait is a “bad thing” in the eyes of society or that the character “wants” to change that trait.

7. Link Traits With Emotions. Each Trait will be linked to two of the Emotions displayed on cards in the center of the table. Players take turns linking one of their two Traits to one of the six Emotions, following these rules:

- The first round, the player to the Host's left chooses first, and the turn proceeds clockwise around the table with the Host choosing last. The second round, the Host chooses first, and the turn proceeds counterclockwise around the table with the player to the Host's left choosing last. The third and fourth rounds repeat the order of the first and second rounds.
- To establish a link, the player writes the name and number (1 to 6) of the Emotion on the Trait's card, and also writes the Trait and its sign (+ or -) on the Emotion's card.
- Each Trait must be linked to exactly two different Emotions.
- No more than six Traits may be linked to any one Emotion.
- No two traits may be linked to the same two Emotions. Each Trait on the table must be linked to a different combination of two Emotions. Check this when making the second link for a Trait, by checking all the Traits listed on the Emotion card for the Trait's already-existing first link. The second link must be to an Emotion card that doesn't list any of those Traits.
- Players are not required to explain why or how the Trait and the Emotion are linked. They can establish that later in play, if they wish.

If any Emotion card has no links to it when the procedure is finished, remove it from play.

8. Fill The Emotions' Token Pools. Starting with the Host, and proceeding clockwise around the table, players take turns placing one token next to any Emotion card they wish. Continue until each player has placed 6 tokens. (Each player should now have 6 tokens remaining in front of them.)

9. Prepare for the First Episode. Each player picks up their tokens in one hand, and then secretly place any number of them (from none to all six) in their other hand, which they then rest on the table. When all have done so, all the players reveal the tokens in the hands that are resting on the table. Whoever has the most tokens in hand discards those tokens into the bowl and becomes the Director for the first episode. If there is a tie, the tied player who is first in sequence clockwise from the Host's left becomes the Director and discards his or her tokens. All other players keep their tokens.

At this point, the Host no longer has any special distinction in subsequent play. The Host is in all respects equal to the other players and follows the same rules.

3. Playing An Episode

The game consists of seven Episodes, each of which is 15 real-time minutes long (regardless of how much time the character seems to be experiencing in the story), followed by a final fifteen-minute Trial.

At the start of each Episode, the Director sets the timer for 15 minutes and places the timer somewhere where the time remaining cannot be seen (but where the timer will be heard when it goes off).

The Director then chooses any one of the Emotions on which to base the new Episode. The Director will begin the Episode by narrating events that would either cause the character to feel that emotion, or be caused by the character feeling (but not acting on) that emotion. For example, if the Emotion is Fear, the Director might relate events that frighten the character (such as falling from a great height) or reflect the character's fear (such as, perhaps, the character suddenly appearing naked in front of a lectern, in front of a large audience).

The Director's narration should also introduce an interesting Thing -- something notable in the scene other than the main character. The Thing will usually, in most games, be another character who fits specifically into the scene. If the character is appearing naked in front of an audience, perhaps the Thing is another character, an emcee who is introducing the main character to the crowd and prompting him to speak, and who is also someone related to or connected to the main character in the main character's life. However, the Thing need not always be a person or a sentient being. If the character is suddenly falling through the air, perhaps the Thing is a tall building that the character is falling past, or the ground that he's falling toward. In those cases, though, the Director should describe something distinctive, memorable, and unusual about the Thing.

Introducing Things -- Whenever any player including the Director introduces a Thing into an Episode, the player should create a card for the Thing. Take a blank card and write the name of the Thing on the card, and the name of the relevant Emotion. (When starting a new Episode, the Director uses the Emotion chosen for the initial Director die roll). Additional information will be written on the card as the Episode develops.

The Director should narrate for a minute or two, or three, enough to give other players things to build on (it's to the Director's advantage if they do so) without taking too much time (it's to the Director's advantage to leave plenty of time for the other players to build up the Episode before the time expires). In the initial narration, the main character should be passive. The narration should describe things the character witnesses or that happen TO the character, but not any important things the character does. (Simple obvious actions, like walking toward something of interest or looking around, are okay. But strong reactions to things, like running away or fighting, should not happen yet.)

The Director also, during or immediately after this initial narration, take up a number of dice equal to the number of tokens in the Emotion chosen, and roll them. This is called the Director roll for the Episode. Before rolling, the Director may add additional dice to the Director roll according to the following rules:

- The Director may spend tokens from his or her own supply, to add one additional die per token.
- The Director may draw a card from the Image deck. If the Director then uses the Image on the card prominently in the scene, the Director adds a die, but if not, loses a die. The Director may draw multiple cards (one at a time, or all at once), but the same rules apply for each card drawn.

It is not to the Director's advantage to make the Director roll too large. In any case, no more than twelve dice may be rolled.

Once the Director roll is rolled, the dice are left in front of the Director for future reference. The Director writes the **value** of the Director roll on the Thing's card.

Interpreting Die Rolls -- The **value** of a die roll is the size of the largest set of matching numbers in the roll. This is something like a Poker hand. For instance, the value of a roll of 1 4 3 4 6 is "two" because there are two 4's in the roll. The larger the set of matching dice, the higher the value. A roll of 2 1 1 3 1 has a higher value than a roll of 6 6 5 5 4 (three for the first, two for the second).

When two rolls have the same value, the roll with the higher **rank** -- that is, the higher numbers in its largest matching set -- beats the other. A roll of 3 3 1 beats a roll of 1 1 6. They both have the same value two, but two 3's beats two 1's. A roll of 5 5 1 1 beats a roll of 3 3 5 6 because two 5's (the best reading of the first roll) beats two 3's.

If two rolls have the same value and rank, the value and rank of the next best set of matching numbers in each hand are compared, and so forth. If only single dice are left, the roll with the highest rank single die wins; if even those are tied, the roll with the next higher single die wins, and so forth. Two rolls are completely tied only if they have the same number of dice and come up with exactly the same set of numbers. If that happens, the roll of the player who is *last* in sequence starting from the current Director and proceeding clockwise around the table wins.

After the Director is finished with the initial narration for the Episode, the players take turns starting from the Director's left and proceeding clockwise around the table.

On each player's turn (other than the Director), the player does the following:

If this is the player's first turn in the current Episode, the player can introduce a new Thing into the scene.

(Due to deadline impending, only the following rough notes are provided for the remaining rules)

- Players narrate Things into the scene during their turns, invoking one of their character Traits and one of the Emotions linked to that trait is linked to the Thing.
- Players add dice to their roll, cumulatively, over all their turns during the episode. They add one die per turn, additional dice for spending tokens, dice for drawing and using Image cards (but lose a die if they draw but cannot use the Image drawn)
- Players can only have one Thing active in the scene at a time. They can start a new Thing on their turn but must clear their accumulated dice as well. The previous Thing goes into the deck, with a Value equal to the value of the previously accumulated die roll.
- When a player's roll beats the Director's (which is not added to during the Director's turns), the player can start narrating character actions. Each time a player does so, the player must remove one of the high dice from the roll, reducing its value again, but may add or remove a token from a relevant Emotion pool.
- When the timer sounds, the player with the highest value roll must give that many tokens to the Director (if the Director has the highest value, he thereby gains nothing) but also gets to choose the next Director, including self (unless he's already the Director, then he can't choose self). The Episode abruptly ends, and the timer is reset. All the current Thing cards get put into the deck, with the value of their respective players' rolls as of the end of the Episode.
- For the final Episode, the Thing cards created during play are shuffled and five each are dealt to the players. Typical draw & play from hand card play ensues. The final Director sets the scene, and with each card played, players briefly describe the Thing reappearing in play. Each card has an Emotion and a Value as established during play. The player playing the card may increase or decrease the token pool for that Emotion, but other players can expend cards of greater total Value to block it. (The dynamic should be something like Kill Dr. Lucky, where the timing of the exhaustion of defensive cards is the deciding factor.)
- Player with the most total Emotion tokens in the Emotions linked to their positive Trait, minus the total of the Emotion tokens in the Emotions linked to their negative

Trait, wins. All positive traits with at least one Emotion pool equal or higher than the smaller of the winner's positive Emotions stay unchanged; any others change. All negative traits with at least one Emotion pool less than the higher of the winner's negative Emotions change; any others stay unchanged.

- Image cards: things like:

Made of flesh instead of metal.

The color yellow, where you wouldn't expect it.

Sharp pointed spines.

A spreading fire ignited.

It's bleeding, but what comes out isn't blood.

That person died long ago.

There should be pain, but nothing is felt.

You can pass right through it.

Someone singing "Dem Bones."

Designer's Notes

Ingredients: GLASS (game theme), EMOTION (major mechanical element), COMMITTEE (unusual aspect of joint control of a single "player character")

Time theme: Single two-hour session

- Based loosely on the micro-genre represented by Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice in Wonderland*, John Crowley's novel *Engine Summer*, Pink Floyd's rock album *The Wall*; and Patrick McGoochan's 17-episode TV series *The Prisoner*. Notable characteristics of this micro-genre are: a single protagonist goes through a series of encounters, real or hallucinatory, in a surreal setting; there's a trial at the end that brings together all the characters from the story to confront the protagonist (or for the protagonist to confront them); it's a transformative experience, with the suggestion that something good is gained and something good is lost. (In *Engine Summer* the trial is the hallucinatory whose-knee game, after Rush takes the combination of medicine's-daughter drugs.)

Some near-miss not-quite-examples of the genre:

- Comic series *Phoebe Zeit-Geist* by Michael O'Donoghue and Frank Springer (doesn't end in a trial, though it does bring all the encountered characters together at the end)
- TV series *Seinfeld* by Jerry Seinfeld (it does end in a trial, but is somewhat less surreal along the way than the other examples, has multiple main characters, and the principal character doesn't undergo any change)
- Film *Labyrinth* by Jim Hensen (doesn't end in a trial)
- Rock album *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* by Genesis (doesn't end in a trial)
- Short story *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens (doesn't end in a trial)