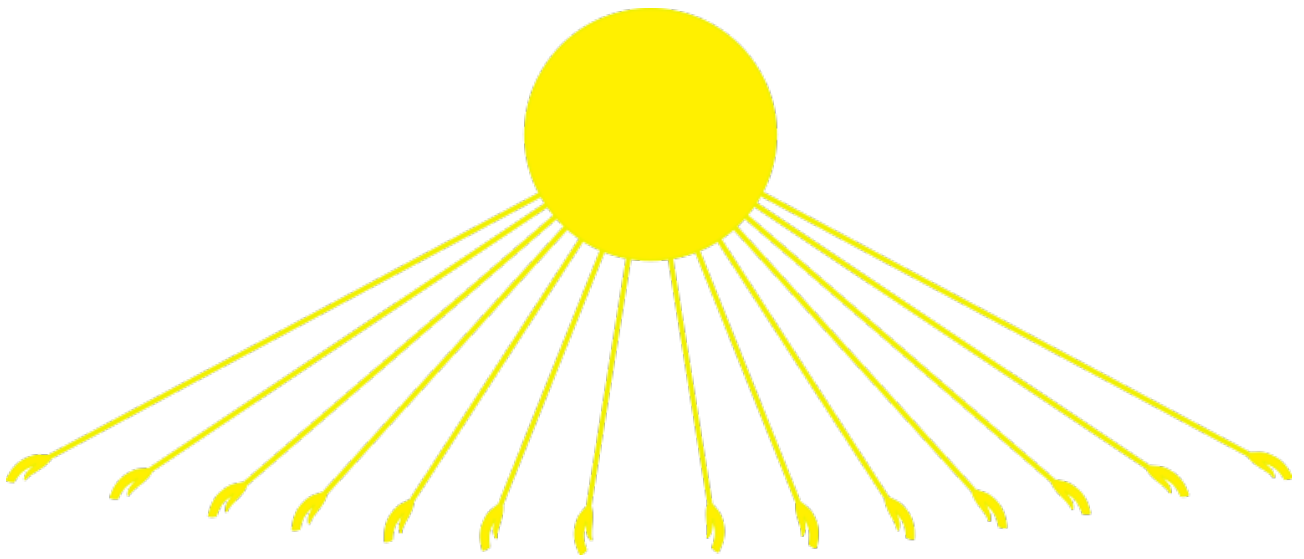


The Sun Never Sets



A Game of Conspiracy and Heresy over Thirty-Two Centuries.

By Daniel Hemmens

The Sun Never Sets

*How manifold it is, what thou hast made!
They are hidden from the face (of man).
O sole god, like whom there is no other!
Thou didst create the world according to thy desire,
Whilst thou wert alone: All men, cattle, and wild beasts,
Whatever is on earth, going upon (its) feet,
And what is on high, flying with its wings.*

*The countries of Syria and Nubia, the land of Egypt,
Thou settest every man in his place,
Thou suppliest their necessities:
Everyone has his food, and his time of life is reckoned.
Their tongues are separate in speech,
And their natures as well;
Their skins are distinguished,
As thou distinguishest the foreign peoples.
Thou makest a Nile in the underworld,
Thou bringest forth as thou desirest
To maintain the people (of Egypt)
According as thou madest them for thyself,
The lord of all of them, wearying (himself) with them,
The lord of every land, rising for them,
The Aton of the day, great of majesty.*

- **The Great Hymn to the Aten** -

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Introduction

What's This All About Then?

The Sun Never Sets is a quasi-historical supernatural-conspiracy-espionage game set primarily in the nineteenth century and the fourteenth century BC, with stopovers at intervals throughout the intervening three millenia.

It is a "24-Hour RPG", meaning that it was designed in (more or less) one 24 hour period. I started typing at 7pm on Sunday April 1st 2007, and finished at 9.05pm on Monday April 2nd. The idea had been kicking about in my head for a while before then, but I was in a tapas bar at the time, so I'm not counting it.

Because it was produced under an artificial time constraint, this game has not been playtested fully, or indeed at all. The core mechanics, however, are simple enough not to need more than minor tweaking. The Flashback mechanics are more complex, and would benefit from more work.

How Does This Game Work Then?

Mostly like every other RPG you've ever played. Players create characters: PCs in this game are the *Hands of the Aten*, immortal members of an ancient conspiracy stretching back to Egypt's eighteenth dynasty and the heretic priest-king Akhenaten. PCs are assumed to have at least a century or so under their belts, and a large part of the game involves inventing centuries-ancient intrigues, which are explored through a series of player-initiated flashbacks. The flashback rules (page 14) provide the primary means for *direct player control* of the game setting.

The Flashbacks are essential to the operation of *The Sun Never Sets* as an espionage or conspiracy game. The thing I love about the genre is the complexity of the plots, the convoluted plans, the Byzantine webs of intrigue and betrayal. On the other hand as a roleplayer I hate having to actually come up with any of that sort of thing in advance. The Flashbacks allow you to build a tangled web of intrigue collaboratively and dynamically in play. At least in theory.

Anything Else I Need to Know?

Since you're reading a 24 hour RPG competition entry, I'm assuming you're already familiar with roleplaying (if not: it's almost but not quite totally unlike a board game crossed with improvisational theatre). Other than that, there's a brief setting chapter to kick you off, and if you want some more information on Akhenaten you can Google for him.

Setting

"If this were a new religion, invented to satisfy our modern scientific conceptions, we could not find a flaw in the correctness of this view of the energy of the solar system. How much Akhenaten understood, we cannot say, but he certainly bounded forward in his views and symbolism to a position which we cannot logically improve upon at the present day. Not a rag of superstition or of falsity can be found clinging to this new worship evolved out of the old Aton of Heliopolis, the sole Lord of the universe" - Flinders Petrie.

History

One thousand, three hundred and thirty six years before the birth of Christ, Amenhotep the Fourth ascended to the throne of Egypt. He was to reign for thirty-eight years, and in that time he would change the face of Egyptian theology. He would abandon the old gods, destroy their temples, outlaw idolatry, and adopt the name by which history would remember him: Akhenaten.

He was succeeded by his son, then named Tutankhatmun. Later kings of Egypt sought to bury all trace of Akhenaten and his heresies, burying his tomb, and the tomb of his son, deep beneath the sand, and erasing all traces of his name from any official records.

This much is a matter of historical record (albeit filtered through the fallible memory of a twenty-first century game designer). What follows next is not a matter of historical record, it is – well – it's made up. But *in character* it's the True And Secret History of the game setting.

Secret History

Akhenaten outlawed all icons and idols save one: the image of the Aten, the disc of sun. The disc was depicted surrounded by rays ending in hands, which are generally thought to symbolise the invisible spirit of Aten. The rays do, indeed, symbolise the immaterial spirit. The hands, however, symbolise something else entirely.

The Hands of the Aten were Akhenaten's elite cadre of spies, assassins, and sorcerers. They were his most trusted agents, and his religious and secular police. They worked from the shadows to enact the reforms which the Pharaoh decreed should take place in the Kingdom of Egypt. When Akhenaten fell, the Hands survived. When the later kings of Egypt erased all memory of the Aten-cult the Hands became the secret servants of a secret king.

In this most absolute secrecy the Hands of the Aten flourished. As dynasties came and went, the Hands endured, and looked outwards. They sent their agents across the sea, and took hold in lands where men were more amenable to their philosophies. For thousands of years they spread their influence, and worked the will of Akhenaten on peasants, priests and princes.

It is now eighteen-sixty-four, and an upstart kingdom called "Britain" oversees an empire on which the sun never sets. The Hands of the Aten are there, from London to Lahore, fighting their shadowy battles for the legacy of their forgotten king.

Modus Operandi

The Hands are a secret conspiracy of spies, assassins, and sorcerers. They are also, at the higher ranks, at least, immortal.

The Hands of the Aten know the secret magics of life and death, and they use this to permit their most favoured agents to return from *Duat*, to be reborn and to live many lives. The principles of this magic are similar to those underlying the process of mummification: the soul of the initiate is called back from the underworld, and they are granted a new life and a new identity by the power of their *Ren*.

Being effectively immortal, the Hands play the long game. Their intrigues cover centuries, their

reach extends across continents.

The Hands in 1864

The Hands of the Aten are still based in Egypt, in El-Amarna, however their primary interest in the 1860s is in the British Empire, and their London chapter-house is, in fact somewhat better staffed and better funded than their official headquarters.

As one might expect, three thousand years changes an organisation somewhat, and where the Hands were once the personal religious police of the Pharaoh of Egypt, they are now a vast and somewhat disparate conspiracy, pursuing countless agendas across hundreds of arenas all over the world.

Which, if you haven't guessed, is my way as designer of saying to you – the players – that the overall agenda of the Hands is entirely up to you. The real Akhenaten lived over three millenia ago, nobody *really* knows what he wanted, or why he felt the need to change Egypt in so radical a way, so frankly you can ascribe whatever motivations to his secret followers you like.

By default, the Hands are interested in promoting monotheism, rationalism, and the British Empire.

Enemies of the Hands

Like their goals, the enemies of the Hands are flexible, and left to the individual play group to define. Some suitable antagonists might include:

The Order of Osiris: You didn't think that the Hands were the only conspiracy to come out of Ancient Egypt did you? Akhenaten's new God stood against everything that the old gods of Egypt stood for. These guys will be a dark reflection (or a light reflection, or a whatever opposite best defines your version of the Hands reflection) of the Hands of the Aten.

National Governments: Nation states don't take kindly to ancient conspiracies of immortal sorcerers meddling in their affairs. They have the advantage of legitimacy, funding, and honest to goodness standing armies if things get really rough.

The East India Company: Technically, this was dissolved in 1858. Then again, technically Akhenaten's reign ended in 1358 BC. No espionage game would be complete without a sinister corporation, and the East India company made your average cyberpunk megacorp look like the women's institute.

Freemasons: They're a classic for a reason. See also Rosicrucians, and of course the good old Knights Templar.

The Catholic Church: A bit overdone, but Akhenaten was strongly opposed to the use of iconography in religious worship, so the good old RCC makes a pretty decent enemy for the Hands. Besides, sinister priests never go out of style.

The Illuminati: Of course, you could just go the whole hog and pit your PCs against the real heavy hitters of the "almost completely made up conspiracy" world. There's also the Hashishim of course: anybody who can kill you while off their face on marijuana has to be dangerous.

Vampires and Atlanteans: Since you're already dealing with serially-reincarnated Egyptian sorcerers enacting the will of a dead mad priest-king whose name was erased from history by his immediate successors, you might want to up the weirdness quotient and go with bloodsuckers and/or ancient technologies.

All of the Above: You've got an entire world to populate. Get out the Encyclopaedia of Obscure Religious movements and chuck them all into the pot. The more strange groups you have bouncing off each other, the more plot threads you have to work with.

Character Creation

Characters in *The Sun Never Sets* are defined by four things: their Stats, their Traits, their Prior Incarnations and their Resources. Stats and Resources are bought with points from a set list. Traits and Incarnations are player-defined.

The Stats:

Characters in *The Sun Never Sets* have five Stats based (loosely) on the five aspects of the soul in Egyptian mythology. Those stats, then are *Ib*, *Ka*, *Ba*, *Sheut* and *Ren*.

Ib – the Heart: The heart, to the Egyptian, was the seat of all thought and emotion. Any task based primarily on intellectual or emotional activity will be based on *Ib*. This will include perception-style checks, for those that like to use them.

Ka – the Life Force: The *Ka* is the life and the physical presence of a person. Any task involving primarily physical activity will be based on *Ka*. Yes, this does include combat.

Ba – the Identity: *Ba* is the closest you get to the modern concept of the “soul”. It is a person's identity and personality. In this game, *Ba* will be used for any task based on force of personality (think of it as a combination of charisma and willpower). Yes, this is a horrible bastardisation of a complex religious concept, but I'm on a time limit here.

Sheut – the Shadow: Bit of a weird one, this. The shadow is literally a person's shadow. It is intimately connected to them, yet distinct. A person's shadow remains even after death. In this game *Sheut* will be used for any task in which a character is attempting to indirectly influence events which are taking place outside of his physical presence.

Ren – the Name: The name of your character is extremely important because – in the made-up cosmology of the game – it is your character's *Ren* which keeps them immortal. The Hands preserve your character's Name, and this allows them to return from *Duat*. *Ren* represents your character's supernatural weight: the stronger your Name the stronger your mystic mojo.

Stats are rated from 1-7. Average is 3-4 (that's PC average, not human average, it's not very meaningful to define a human average for essentially abstract statistics). Characters have 20 points to divide amongst their Stats.

Each Stat has an associated *Spirit Pool*, a reserve of energy your character can use to accomplish tasks. The pools associated with the Stats are, from the top, Heart (*Ib*), Life (*Ka*), Self (*Ba*), Shadow (*Sheut*) and Name (*Ren*). These pools have a variety of different uses, of which one of the most important is the initiation of Flashbacks.

Traits:

Traits are unique, player-defined qualities which give a character bonuses whenever they become applicable. A Trait can be anything, although for reasons of verisimilitude I suggest that they remain positive and beneficial qualities, so we don't get into the “why does my fear of cats make me better at dealing with cats” problem.

When a character attempts a task to which one of their Traits applies, they may reroll all failed dice once. Of course this little nugget of information will make more sense once you've actually read the task resolution system.

A character has three traits, or four if their player only wishes to take one Incarnation.

Incarnations:

Incarnations are people you used to be. The Hands do not “reincarnate” as such, but when they die they may be reborn into a newly created body by means of a ritual passed down from

ancient Egypt. The degree to which a reborn Hand is the same person depends very much on the circumstances of their rebirth, which depend very much on player preference. He will always have the same *Ren* and the same *Ba*, the Name is the means by which the ritual is performed, and the *Ba* is the identity which is restored. If the original heart can be salvaged, then that will be carried over between incarnations as well, but that is not always possible.

What this means is that, depending on your preference, your incarnations could wind up being jobs your character wound up doing at different stages in history, or they could wind up being completely different people (perhaps even with conflicting goals and agendas) .

A character has a maximum of two incarnations, one of which must be their original incarnation. If a player specifically wishes their character never to have been reborn they may take an additional Trait instead.

Incarnations provide a character with bonuses when using the Flashback mechanics.

Sideline: Why Only Two Incarnations?

The idea here is to encourage characters to develop in play. At character creation you only describe two incarnations: the person you started off as, and somebody you've been in the interim. As we'll see in the Flashback rules, *any player can add Incarnations to their character at any time*. The first two are just to get the ball rolling.

Resources:

Resources are stuff that your character owns or has access to. These are picked from the following list:

Wealth: You're rich. Add your Wealth rating in dice to any task which you can solve by throwing money at it.

Arms: You carry weapons. Add your Arms rating in dice to all rolls in combat.

Minions: You have servants at your beck and call. Add your Minions rating in dice to any task you accomplish through their aid. Such tasks will usually be rolled using your *Sheut*.

Status: You have a certain amount of legitimate status in the mundane world of the 1860s. Add your Status rating in dice to any task that involves throwing your weight around.

Magic: You are an accomplished sorcerer, and can use the old magic to aid your cause. Add your Magic rating in dice to any task which you aid with sorcerous ritual.

Kit: A bit of a catch-all really. Kits are bits and pieces of gear that help you do specific things. You add your Kit rating in dice to any task that the Kits are used on. Notice that essentially everything else on this list is just a specific sort of Kit. A character may buy more than one set of Kit, representing different sorts of equipment. Kit includes clothes appropriate to whatever walk of life you're kitting out for.

A character has five points to spend on Resources. Not a lot, but you don't need a lot.

Example of Character Creation

Aaron A Aaronson has decided to create a character for a game of *The Sun Never Sets*. He's got a couple of sketchy ideas but, because he's *that* sort of player, he decides to go with an assassin. Because somebody has to.

He grabs hold of a piece of paper, and begins to scribble down some ideas: he decides that the character will currently be working as a missionary in Africa, the perfect cover for a deadly Egyptian assassin! Thinking a bit more about his character background, and deciding to go with the religious connection, Aaron decides that his character was originally a courtier to King

Henry the Eighth at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries, and his activities in that time naturally brought him to the religiously minded, iconoclastic, Hands of the Aten.

He begins to scribble down his Stats. If he's going to be an assassin, he'll need a high *Ka* (since shooting people is a decidedly physical act). As a former nobleman, he's also going to need a reasonable amount of *Ba* and *Ib* – you don't get your way in court without some kind of personality, and a reasonable intellect. He's much less worried about *Sheut* – this isn't the sort of person who works through intermediaries – and he has no feelings one way or the other about *Ren*.

After some fiddling, he winds up with the following:

Ib: 4 (No slouch, but not a genius)
Ka: 6 (Moves like a snake)
Ba: 5 (Forceful)
Sheut: 2 (I work ... *alone*)
Ren: 3 (His name is recorded by the Hands)

Notice that this distribution also gives him the following Spirit Pools: Heart 4, Life 6, Self 5, Shadow 2, Name 3.

He then turns to traits. These are fairly easy: he picks "Deadly Assassin," "Very Religious" and "Self-confident." He writes these down.

Step three is Incarnations. "Courtier to Henry VIII" is already set – that's his original identity. He needs another one now, and it can come from anywhere in the intervening few centuries. In the end he decides that it makes sense for his character to have remained embroiled in high-society and religious conflict pretty much constantly through the ages, so he adds "Walsingham's Agent" as his second Incarnation.

The last step is Resources. He spends three of his five points on Arms – note that he does not *specify* what weapons his character carries, just that his character goes armed, and that his weapons are worth three dice when they are used. He spends the remaining two points on Kit, specifically he invests one die in Assassin's Kit and one die in Missionary's Kit. Again, the contents of these kits are not specified.

Aaron decides to name his character William Rivers, and he's ready to go.

Task Resolution

Task resolution in *The Sun Never Sets* uses a fairly standard dice pool system, similar to the one used in *Vampire* or *The Burning Wheel*.

When a character attempts a task (again, I'm assuming that you're an experienced roleplayer, and will have a pretty good idea of what a "task" is, which would probably be a site better than any definition I could give at this point) he rolls a number of six-sided dice equal to his most applicable Stat. Every die that shows a 4-6 is a "success" and every die that shows a 1-3 is a "failure." If a character has useful Resources, he can roll extra dice for those. If he has an applicable Trait, he can reroll all of his failures.

The one line summary:

Roll Stat + Resource: 4+ = Success.

That's basically it. Everything else is a variation on the same principle.

Difficulty

No RPG rulebook would be complete without a difficulty table consisting of a bunch of spurious synonyms for the word "difficult" arranged in an arbitrary hierarchy.

Before that, though, a quick word about statistics. Fortunately, the maths for this system is very simple: Take the number of dice you're rolling, divide by two, that's the number of successes you expect to get (on average). If a character has an applicable trait, you'd expect three-quarters of their dice to come up successes. So "Difficulty 2" really means "the sort of thing you would expect a person with a Stat of 4 to succeed at most of the time" and "Difficulty 3" means "the sort of thing you would expect a person with a Stat of 4 and an applicable trait, or a person with a stat of 6, to succeed at most of the time".

That said, here's the table:

Difficulty	Description
1	Easy. Literally anybody has at least a 50/50 chance of success.
2	Average. Anybody with a decent Stat has a decent chance.
3	Difficult. You need either a really good Stat, or resources, or a Trait.
4	Very Difficult. This one needs good Stats, good luck, and some kind of bonus.
5	Extremely Difficult. Either you're rolling ten dice, or you got lucky.
6+	"Legendary." Requires serious good fortune, or moderate min-maxing.

I'm not going to give examples of "difficult", "very difficult" and "extremely difficult" tasks, because they'd be wholly arbitrary, and you probably wouldn't agree with my assessment (no way is walking a tightrope easier than doing advanced calculus!).

For Example: William Rivers (the sample character from the previous chapter) is attempting to pick a lock, because it's the standard example for this type of action. It's a physical action, so he rolls his Ka of 6 plus 1 from his Assassin's Kit for a total of seven dice.

The GM decides that picking a lock is a Difficult action, and agrees that the "Deadly Assassin" Trait applies to lockpicking. Aaron (the player) rolls 7D6, but unfortunately gets only two successes. Fortunately he gets a reroll from his Trait, so he gets to roll the five failed dice again. He gets another two successes on the reroll, for a total of four. The lock clicks open.

Opposed Actions

This is going to be really short.

If two people are working against each other, they both roll their respective dice, and the one with the most successes wins. That's about it really.

For Example: William Rivers is playing a deadly game of cat-and-mouse with another assassin. They stalk one another mercilessly through the fog-shrouded streets of London. This is an opposed roll based on *Ib*. Once again, Rivers' "Deadly Assassin" trait applies, but in this case his kit doesn't help. He's having to rely on his wits. Aaron rolls his character's *Ib* for two successes, then rerolls the failures and gets another one for a total of three successes. The GM rolls for the enemy assassin. He gets four successes, and the assassin ambushes Rivers in a dark alleyway!

By the way, we'll come back to this example later.

A Hiding to Nothing: Trying Again

If your character tries to do something, and fails, he can try again, *however* for every point by which he failed to meet the Difficulty of the task, his dice pool is reduced by one. This, of course, mounts up quickly, since the character is now even less likely to succeed than they were before. The aim here is to allow people to retry tests they probably shouldn't have failed at, without getting into the situation where people just keep trying until they succeed.

For Example: Clothilde du Bois, a Hand currently living the life of an American *débutante* in the middle of the civil war, is busily rifling through the personal effects of a Confederate general whose affections she has managed to worm her way into. She is searching for any incriminating evidence she might be able to find which connects him to the cult she's investigating.

She rolls her *Ib* of 3 and gets a spectacular one success against a difficulty of 2. She *can* carry on searching, but she'll now only be rolling two dice, and she'll need to get two successes. Of course it's still a one in four chance, so she might as well take her chances. Then again, you never know when the general will be back...

Strength to Strength: Planning and Preparing

No espionage game would be complete without detailed, intricate plans. On the other hand the process of coming up with detailed, intricate plans is long and difficult, and it's always frustrating for your character's abilities to be limited to your own.

To reconcile these two factors, we have the Planning and Preparing rules (which incidentally also cover PCs helping each other, as well as any other situation in which the results of one action affect another). They're basically an extension of the Hiding to Nothing rules above.

A character, or group of characters, can *plan and prepare* for a given task by performing other tasks and carrying their successes forwards. The way it works is this:

Every success you roll *over and above* the Difficulty of a task grants you an extra die on the task for which it prepares.

In order to keep the dice pools down to a manageable size, and to close certain obvious loopholes, there is a hard limit on the number of tasks which may be used to prepare for any given task. The limit is:

One task of Difficulty 1, *Two* tasks of Difficulty 2, *Three* tasks of difficulty 3, and so on. The idea here is that you have to "gear up" to an extremely difficult task in order to get extra dice.

n.b. If a character *fails* a given Preparation task, then the *deficit* in successes is applied as a *penalty* to the final task (as per the Hiding to Nothing rules). The failed task *does* count

against the preparation limit for the final task.

Opposed rolls do not have a limit, because they do not have a fixed difficulty. However for an opposed roll to count as preparation, it must be made against the intended target of the final task.

For Example: When we last left William Rivers, he had been ambushed by a rival assassin. The game of deadly cat and mouse in which they were engaged can be considered Preparation for the attack that would surely follow. His assailant will, therefore roll one extra die in the first round of combat. It isn't much, but it could tip the balance.

Clothilde du Bois, on the other hand, having failed to find conclusive evidence incriminating the General, decided to take a slightly more drastic route. She intends to drug him, then convince him to tell her his secrets while he's insensible. Preparing the potion is a mental task (*Ib*) with a difficulty of 2, but it allows Clothilde to use her "Poisoner" trait and claim a two die bonus from her Herbalist's Kit. She rolls well, reaping four successes on her Preparation. Slipping the poison into the General's glass is much easier: it's Difficulty 1, physical (*Ka*), and she once again gets to use her *Poisoner* trait. She rolls three successes, granting her another two bonus dice. When she finally attempts to wheedle the secrets from the general, she is rolling her *Ba* (force of personality) plus two dice for her well-prepared drug, plus two dice for skilfully administering it. Hopefully, that should be more than enough.

A Helping Hand: Co-Operative Actions

Co-operative actions work exactly the same way as Preparation and Planning, the only difference is that the Preparation is not carried out by the same character that carries out the final Task. The same limits apply: if one character rolls to "help" against Difficulty 1, the next character has to roll against Difficulty 2, so does the next. Helper number four needs to roll against a Difficulty of 3, and so on.

For Example: Rivers and Du Bois have joined forces (Rivers, fleeing the assassins sent after him by forces unknown, took a clipper across the Atlantic). They find themselves once again set upon by strange assailants. Since Rivers is a gentlemanly sort, his first thought is the safety of Miss du Bois, and therefore opts to interpose himself between her and the oncoming cultists. He rolls his *Ka* plus three dice for his weaponry (he doesn't get the "Deadly Assassin" bonus this time) against a mighty difficulty of 1. He rolls five successes, which immediately translate into five bonus dice Miss du Bois can use to protect herself from their attackers.

Working Through Shadow

Minions, minor servants of major characters, always count as a Resource being used with the controlling character's *Sheut*. A servant literally represents the shadow of his master. Fighting somebody who is attacking you through Shadows is extremely difficult, since you can never really strike back at them directly.

Any character may *Work Through Shadow* by spending a point from his Shadow Pool. This allows the character to work through agents and intermediaries, but to play them himself, as if they were his character. *All* rolls made while *Working Through Shadow* are based on *Sheut*.

Spirit Pools

Characters in *The Sun Never Sets* have five pools of points which they can spend for a variety of different in-game effects. Most of these effects translate directly into dice pool bonuses, but some have more concrete in-game effects. Furthermore, remember that all Spirit Pools can be used to trigger Flashbacks.

Heart (*Ib*)

A character may spend a single point of *Heart* to roll an extra die on an *Ib*-based task.
A character may spend a single point of *Heart* to re-roll a single die on any task in which thought or emotion play a significant part, even if that roll is not based on *Ib*. This includes most rolls involving learned skills. This re-roll is in addition to Trait re-rolls.
A character may spend a single point of *Heart* to trigger a Flashback revealing *important information*.

Life (*Ka*)

A character may spend a single point of *Life* to roll an extra die on any *Ka*-based task.
A character's *Life* is a measurement of how much damage they can stand before being incapacitated in the detailed combat rules.
A character may spend a single point of *Life* to trigger a flashback revealing that *they have done something before*.

Self (*Ba*)

A character may spend a single point of *Self* to roll an extra die on any *Ba*-based task.
A character may spend a single point of *Self* to resist any attempt to persuade him or coerce him into a course of action, be that persuasion natural or supernatural.
A character may spend a single point of *Self* to trigger a flashback revealing *the nature of a past relationship*.

Shadow (*Sheut*)

A character may spend a single point of *Shadow* to roll an extra die on any *Sheut*-based task.
A character may spend a single point of *Shadow* to *Work Through Shadows* for a scene.
A character may spend a single point of *Shadow* to trigger a flashback revealing *the nature and extent of their influence*.

Name (*Ren*)

A character may spend a single point of *Name* to roll an extra die on any *Ren*-based task.
A character may spend a single point of *Name* to invoke the power of the old magic.
A character may spend a single point of *Name* to trigger a flashback revealing *supernatural mysteries*.

Refreshing Spirit Pools

A character's spirit pools refresh at the rate of one point per in-character day, provided the following conditions are met.

For *Heart*, the character must not have denied either his emotions or his rational judgement during that day. Furthermore, he must not be suffering from any sickness or curse which affects their heart.

For *Life*, the character must have eaten, drunk, and slept sufficiently that day, and must not be suffering any sickness.

For *Self*, the character must have allowed himself to act in accordance with his nature (by the

judgement of the player). He cannot be under any form of curse or influence affecting his personality.

For *Shadow* the character must have cast a shadow at some point during the day, and must have remained concealed from his enemies.

For *Name*, the true name (i.e. the birth name) of the character must have been spoken that day, or must be recorded somewhere in a place of safety. By default, all the Hands have their true names recorded at the headquarters of the order in el Amarna.

Flashbacks

Flashbacks have two purposes in the game. Firstly, they are the means by which players can actively and dynamically edit the backplot of the game. When a player triggers a flashback, he is the one who sets the scene, says what is going on, and sets things in motion. Once a flashback has started, the GM is back in the hot seat, and (in theory at least) it's the GM's reaction to the player's situation which keeps the whole scene interesting.

The second function of the flashbacks is to create the sense of a vast and intricate web of intrigues and interactions stretching back over three thousand years, without having to go to all the trouble of designing such a thing in advance.

Hello ... Old Friend: Triggering Flashbacks

A player (and only a player, not the GM) can trigger a flashback at *any time* by spending a point from one of his character's Spirit Pools. Once triggered, the player *describes the scene*. It is important to understand that:

When describing the scene, the authority of the triggering player is absolute.

Essentially, the player assumes all the powers of the GM for the time it takes to set the scene of the flashback. Of course, like the GM, the player should temper his absolute power with a regard for the wishes of the other players. While a player *technically* has the authority to say "Paris, 1814, your character has just finished giving my character a blow job" it's not going to make you any friends.

The player should use this moment of power to make the *revelation* required by the flashback. All flashbacks *must* reveal something which is *pertinent to the scene they interrupt*. Furthermore, the revelation must be in keeping with the spirit pool used to trigger it. The requirements are listed in the previous chapter, but to recap:

Heart reveals *pertinent information*.

Life reveals *that a character has done something before*.

Self reveals *prior relationships*.

Shadow reveals *a character's influence*.

Name reveals *supernatural mysteries*.

The scene which plays out will then embellish on the initial revelation. The purpose of this system is to initiate a dialogue amongst the play group through which the background of a situation can be developed. It is not designed to allow players to leverage every possible advantage they can get out of a situation.

Resolving Flashbacks

Once a player has triggered a flashback, described the initial scene, and made the revelation, the reins are handed back to the GM, and the whole situation plays out as if it were an ordinary scene in the game.

Note that once the flashback is in progress, its character may change considerably from what the player originally intended. The intent of this system is to create a situation in which no one person (player or GM) has absolute control over the backstory.

A flashback is exactly as long or as short as it needs to be. It could last a couple of moments (if all a player wanted to do was to declare a particular piece of information to be the case), or it could evolve into a sub-game all of its own if everybody gets really into it.

Once a flashback has achieved its intended purpose, the initiating player rolls the Stat associated with the Spirit Pool used to trigger the flashback (eg, if you triggered with Life, you would roll *Ka*, if you triggered with Name, you would roll *Ren*). This roll has no difficulty, and

every success generated counts as a bonus to be used on any appropriate roll made in the scene which the flashback originally interrupted.

No Traits apply to the Flashback Resolution roll, but if the flashback was to one of a character's *pre-defined Incarnations* they may reroll failed dice, just as if they had used an appropriate Trait.

A Tangled Web: Gatecrashing Flashbacks

If your character is cut out of a flashback, you may choose to *gatecrash* by spending a point from one of your own Spirit Pools. This must be accompanied by a new revelation appropriate to the pool you used.

Unlike the initiator of the flashback, you only get to describe your character's entrance to the scene, not any of the surrounding detail. As ever, the onus is on you, the player, not to use these rules in ways which annoy or upset the other players.

A player may only gatecrash a flashback which takes place during the lifetime of his character.

Note to GMs:

For this to work, you can't get too attached to your NPCs and plots. Any player can, at any time, make up details about their past which have nothing to do with you. They can make them do things (or rather, have done things) which you would never have thought that they would do. You have to view your players as co-creators and collaborators, otherwise you're just going to bang heads with each other.

Note to Players:

That goes for you guys as well. These rules only work if you don't try to use them to power grab, or to make all the NPCs look like idiots. Before you use these rules to declare that the main villain was really your character's puppet all along, spare a thought for the GM. Don't stamp all over his ideas, you wouldn't want him to stamp over yours. Besides, if he has to, he can use the *That Was Then, This Is Now*, rule to trump you.

That Was Then, This Is Now: The Ramifications of Flashbacks

A player's revelations, made as part of a flashback, are set in stone. What the player says happened, happened. The GM, however, remains in control of the situation in 1864. The implications a flashback holds for the "present day" are just that: implications. The GM still ultimately has the power to decide what that means in real terms.

GMs: this is not a licence to completely ignore flashbacks, but it is a get-out clause if you really, really need it. In general it is far better to ask a player to tone down a particularly apocalyptic revelation, rather than to accept it and then undermine it.

Some Examples

Flashbacks are the most unusual idea in *The Sun Never Sets*, so they might require a bit more in the way of discussion than the rest of the rules. Hopefully these examples should explain things a bit more clearly.

Example One:

Clothilde du Bois and William Rivers have escaped the cult assassins who had lately been pursuing them. They have ducked into a small coffee house to gather their thoughts.

Clothilde's player spends a point of Heart, triggering a flashback revealing *pertinent information*. The player (let us call her Elizabeth Evans) describes the scene:

"It's 1475, before I joined the Hands, I was still living with my father in Gascony. It's the night he was murdered, and I'm looking over his dead body. I can see a man vanishing into the darkness, and he's wearing the same crimson sash that these killers are wearing now."

Elizabeth's revelation is: the cultists that she and Rivers are investigating are the same people who killed her father nearly four hundred years ago. The GM doesn't have any particular input to make into this flashback, and Elizabeth is happy to leave it there. The flashback is resolved, and Elizabeth rolls her character's *Ib* (and since this is one of her predefined incarnations, she gets to reroll any failures). Any successes she gets will give her a bonus die on her next roll to investigate the cultists.

Example Two:

Let's revisit Mr Rivers' encounter with the assassin in the London fog one more time (after all, we never actually described the fight in detail). The assassin springs out of the darkness, blade in hand. "Hold on," says Aaron (Rivers' player), "Flashback." He spends a point of *Life* and sets the scene.

"It's revolutionary France, I'm undercover as the footman to the Marquis de Vere. It's foggy, and I'm on the banks of the Sienne, when a man dressed exactly like this guy comes for me."

Aaron's revelation is "I have fought these people before". In this case the GM *does* want the scene to carry on, for a short while at least, so he can work out what happened between Rivers and the Assassin. He has Rivers make a *Ka* roll, opposed against some hastily improvised stats for the assassin. Rivers wins, he dispatches the assassin swiftly. Now the flashback is resolved, Aaron rolls Rivers' *Ka*, notice that he does *not* get to reroll failures, because this incarnation is not one of those he put on his character sheet.

Example Three:

Clothilde and Rivers have followed the trail of the assassins to a Louisiana antiques dealer by the name of Napier. Aaron spends a point of *Self* to trigger a flashback relating to past relationships.

"It's last year," he says "In London, and I've just caught this guy trying to steal the Amulet of Samar ... I mean ... of el Amarna from my inside pocket. I've got him by the scruff of the neck."

There's lots of things to notice here. Firstly, notice that a flashback does *not* have to be to 200 years ago, it can be to last night if you want. Secondly, notice that Aaron used this flashback to make some quite explicit implications about the way this NPC works (he's a petty crook, a pickpocket, but seems to know what he's looking for). Finally, the amulet Aaron was talking about might well be something he'd just made up. You can do that in flashbacks too.

The GM and Aaron play through this little encounter for a while, Rivers is threatening, Napier is evasive. After a little while, Elizabeth chimes in.

"At around this point," she says "I come around the corner and say 'Put him down William, Mr Napier is working for *me*.'"

Elizabeth has gatecrashed the flashback, spending a point of *Shadow* in order to do so.

Now this happy little scene will play itself out, Rivers will get a bonus to his *Ba* rolls when dealing with Napier (from the flashback), Clothilde will *not*, because it wasn't her flashback, she just gatecrashed it. However when we snap back to present day, the events of the flashback will be a concrete part of the background, which will probably make it much easier for all parties involved to get what they want out of Mr Napier.

Appendix One: Combat

Chances are, combat is going to be a fairly big part of *The Sun Never Sets*, it's essentially an occult spy game, and somebody is bound to pull a gun or throw a punch at some point.

So why, then, is it relegated to an appendix? Partially, I'm just trying to preserve my indie-game-cred. Explicit combat subsystems are rather out of fashion these days, the consensus seems to be that you don't need them. The other reason, however, is to make crystal clear that this subsystem is *optional*. You can resolve all combat quite well using the normal rules for Opposed Tests. I roll $Ka + Arms$, you roll $Ka + Arms$, whoever gets most successes wins.

But to be honest, a lot of people like to have a detailed combat system. Or at least a comparatively detailed combat subsystem, and to be honest it'll probably be useful. So here it is.

Three Levels of Detail

Just to underline the "this is optional" factor, the combat system works in three optional levels of detail: "No detail," "Some detail," and "Blow By Blow."

The "No Detail" system is rather like the system in *Advanced Fighting Fantasy* (and is relatively similar to just not using the combat system at all). Both participants roll their $Ka + Arms$, whoever rolls highest wins the exchange and does damage to their opponent, reducing their opponent's Life by a number of points equal to the number of successes they rolled *above* their opponent's total.

The "Some Detail" system allows players to customise their actions in combat slightly more, generally choosing between offensive and defensive options.

The "Blow by Blow" system is, to be honest, not much more detailed than that, it adds some more strategic options to combat for those that want them.

Some Detail

The "No Detail" system is described above in all its glory: you just roll, high roller wins.

The "Some Detail" system adds the following option: you can choose for your character to be *Aggressive* or *Defensive*.

If your character is being *Aggressive*, that means that he is concentrating on hurting the enemy above protecting himself. Take any number of dice from your $Ka + Arms$ pool and set them aside. Those dice are not rolled. Make your roll with the dice you have left. If you beat your opponent (i.e. if you roll more successes than he does) you put all the dice you set aside back into your pool *as successes*.

Being *Defensive* is the opposite. You take any number of dice from your Ka pool and set them aside. Unlike being *Aggressive*, however, you cannot choose to set aside *Arms* dice, those have to be rolled. If you roll more successes than your opponent, your set-aside dice are wasted. If you roll *fewer* successes than your opponent, put all the set aside dice back into your pool *as successes*. Your opponent only hits you if they still have more successes than you in total.

That's it for the Some Detail system. Otherwise everything works exactly the same.

Blow By Blow

In the Blow By Blow system, your character describes whether they are being *Aggressive* or *Defensive* as before, but now there's a couple more options.

Instead of just "attacking" your opponent, you need to pick one of three forms of attack:

Strike, Advantage Self, Disadvantage Opponent. All three of these manoeuvres count as "Aggressive," because they all involve taking the initiative from your opponent and gaining some sort of advantage over him.

In blow-by-blow combat, the aggressor will describe his attack, the defender will describe his response, and the roll will determine who winds up on top (this is much like the no-detail and some-detail systems).

If the winner's aim was to *strike* his opponent, then everything works exactly like the *some-detail* system. The winner deals damage to the loser, reducing their Life by one point for every success they get over their opponent.

If the winner's aim was to *advantage himself* (which could represent moving to better ground, grabbing an improvised weapon, whatever) then he increases his dice pool by the number of successes he rolled. Unlike normal Preparations, this increase remains in place for the *entire* combat (and can be increased later).

If the winner's aim was to *Disadvantage his opponent* (which could represent a disarm, a throw, or chucking sand in the guy's face) then his opponent's dice pool is reduced by an amount equal to the number of successes the winner rolled above the loser.

The aim here is not to make combat complicated, but to provide a reasonable way to model a variety of common strategies or tricks that players might want to use.

An Absurd Example

This is a quick example of the combat system in action, designed to highlight the necessary abstractions involved in the "Advantage Self, Disadvantage Opponent" system of manoeuvres.

Let's get back to Rivers and the Assassin. Let's also assume that the Assassin is just as tough as Rivers is: Ka 6, Arms 3.

In the first round of combat, Rivers decides to disarm the assassin. We won't go through it in detail, that's not the point of this example. Let's say he beats the Assassin, but only by one success. The assassin is disarmed (Rivers won the exchange), and his dice pool is reduced by one. It is reduced by one *even though he has been fully disarmed, and has three points invested in Arms*. The important thing here is that the "Arms" resource really represents the amount the *player* has chosen to invest in the character's ability to win fights. The actual physical weapons are immaterial.

In the next round, the Assassin chooses "Advantage Self" as his manoeuvre, and wins by two successes. He recovers his weapon, and he's got a bonus die in his pool. Again, the advantage gained by the "Advantage Self" manoeuvre is not related to the actual action you take to get it.

Even at its most detailed, this is a highly abstract combat system.

Damage and Injury

Damage suffered by characters is subtracted directly from their Life pool. When a character's Life is reduced to zero they are incapacitated. An Incapacitated character is potentially going to be seriously wounded.

After the battle is over, an Incapacitated character needs to make a roll for recovery, based on either their *Ka* or their *Ba*. So long as the character gets at least one success, they will recover, comparatively quickly. Their Life will recover at the normal rate.

If the character *fails* the roll then they die, and pass on into *Duat*.

Death and The Dead

A dead character has two options. Firstly, a dead character can still *Act Through Shadow*. They still have their full *Sheut* score and can influence the world indirectly and indefinitely through their intermediaries.

Secondly, a dead character can be restored to life using the Rite of Rebirth. See the Magic rules in the second appendix.

Fighting Shadows

Should one participant in a combat be *Working Through Shadows*, that character rolls their attacks as normal, but if the character *Working Through Shadows* loses an exchange in combat, they lose only a single point of Shadow and no Life. Once a character who is *Working Through Shadows* has lost an exchange in combat, they must retreat and withdraw their influence for the rest of the scene.

Being Outnumbered And Other Headaches

If a character is outnumbered, outgunned, or otherwise fighting at a disadvantage, they count as being on a *Hiding to Nothing*. Every time they fail a roll in combat, their dice pools are penalised by an amount equal to their margin of failure. This is in addition to any penalties that might come about as a result of their opponent's combat manoeuvres.

Appendix Two: The Old Magic

Frankly, I know bugger all about genuine Egyptian occultism. The systems provided here are, therefore largely a matter of abstract game mechanics. The question what the Old Magic of Egypt can do is largely up to the individual play group to resolve. The suggestions given here are just that, suggestions.

The Basics

The basic idea is that any character proficient in the Old Magic (which, by default, includes all PCs, it's part of the basic training package for the Hands of Aten) can spend a point of Name to activate the *Old Magic* for one scene. This allows the character to use their *Ren* to perform most mundane tasks by magic. As a general rule, the Old Magic is too slow to use directly in combat, although it can be used directly to harm people if you know their true name.

The Difficulty to perform a task by magic is one higher than the difficulty to perform the task by mundane means. Magic is a more flexible tool, but a less effective one. Effects that can *only* be produced by magic will have their own GM assigned Difficulty.

The Rite of Rebirth

One of the most important Rites of the Old Magic is the Rite of Rebirth. To perform it you *must* know the True Name (that is to say, the *Ren*) of the subject to be called forth from *Duat*.

The ritual requires the preparation of a vessel for the subject to inhabit, which must possess a heart (if the subject's original heart cannot be retrieved) and must be infused with the *Ka* of a living being (which requires a ritual animal sacrifice).

The Difficulty of the Rite of Rebirth is equal to 8 minus the *Ren* of the subject. The stronger your name, the easier it is to call you with it.

If the Rite of Rebirth fails, it can be attempted again, but the *Hiding to Nothing* rules apply. It is therefore often worth Preparing the ritual carefully.

Resisting Magic

The subject of a spell can resist the effects by pitting their *Ren* against that of the caster. This natural resistance is always in addition to any other defence that might be possible against a spell.

Magic in Combat

Magic is not the most effective weapon in a straight fight. Anybody wishing to use magic in combat must *first* win the exchange in combat as normal, then *instead* of striking their opponent, they win the chance to *attempt* to cast a spell.

Remote Magic

Using magic on a target outside your physical presence follows all the rules for *Working Through Shadows*, you need to spend a point of Shadow as well as a point of Name, and all rolls are made on *Sheut*, not on *Ren*.

Other Common Magical Effects

Apportion Ka: A magician may transfer Life from one willing (or incapacitated) subject into another. The Difficulty of this effect is equal to the total number of points of Life you want to transfer. This can be used to heal the sick and the wounded. If either party resists, this is an Opposed Roll.

Withering Curse: A magician may use the Old Magic to curse a target within line of sight with physical harm. This is an Opposed check, *Ren* versus *Ren*. If the caster scores more successes than the target, the number of extra successes they gain translates directly into Life points lost by the target.

Sustaining Power of the Aten: A magician may always choose to lose *Name* instead of *Life* if damaged in combat. This effect is automatic if the Old Magic is activated.

Curse of Suasion: A magician may attempt to use the Old Magic to influence the mind of a subject. This is an opposed roll, *Ren* versus *Ren*. The subject may spend a point of *Self* to ignore the effects of this spell entirely.

Debilitating Curse: A magician may damage the *Ib*, *Ka*, or *Ba* of a victim, preventing them from regaining Heart, Life, or Self. Again this is an opposed roll, *Ren* versus *Ren*, with the effect lasting a full month for every success the magician scores above that of his victim. This manner of curse, however, requires that the sorcerer know the True Name of his victim.

Shapeshifting: A magician may adopt the form of an animal. This is tricky, but cool. It's particularly useful for the ability to fly. In combat, an animal form counts as *Preparation* for battle, so you get an extra die on all your combat rolls for each success in excess of the Difficulty of this effect. The base difficulty is 4. This is a trick for the serious sorcerers.

Players and GMs are strongly encouraged to invent their own uses for the old magic, which can range from the subtle to the apocalyptic, depending on the flavour of your game.

Appendix Three: Example of Play

This isn't a real example of play, the time constraints made it impossible to actually run any playtesting before submission. It's a hypothetical example of play designed to showcase the system in full as it should, in theory, work.

The players, then, are Aaron Aaronson, playing William Rivers, Elizabeth Evans, playing Clothilde du Bois, and Christopher Crane, playing the ancient sorceress Neferu-Neferu Aten. The GM is going to be unnamed, and referred to throughout as "The GM."

The scene is this: the three Hands of the Aten have been investigating a sect of assassins who they have traced back to a West African animal-cult, which spread into Europe after colonisation, and from there across the Atlantic to the US.

They are currently working on breaking into the manor of the Governor of Massachusetts in the hope that this will provide them with some much needed leads. The house is well guarded, both by men, and by a pair of strangely intelligent Leopards.

Rivers and Evans are at the scene. Neferu is *Working Through Shadows* – she has sent a falcon to watch events, and communicate with the other two characters. She has already spent a point of Shadow to pay for this, and a point of Name to activate the Old Magic.

There is a short interval of planning, during which it is decided that Neferu, through her falcon, will reconnoitre the area, while Rivers takes care of the guards. Clothilde will use then sneak in, hoping to be able to charm her way out if anybody catches them.

They start with Neferu's aerial reconnaissance: it's Difficulty 1, because it's pretty damned trivial. She rolls her *Sheut* (since she's Working Through Shadow) and gets three successes. Two of those are set aside to be used for the final break-in.

Meanwhile, Rivers is getting his stealth on. The guards outside the mansion aren't important enough to use the detailed combat system, so they're just dealt with using ordinary *Ka* rolls (and don't forget that he gets the Trait reroll for his "Deadly Assassin" trait). The GM, a little generously (anybody would think he was specifically trying to showcase the system) allows each attempt to eliminate a guard count as one Difficulty 2 Preparation. William Rivers manages to eliminate both the guards with his ludicrous *Ka* + Weaponry dice pool, and manages to store up another three successes to put towards Miss du Bois' attempt to get into the building.

Clothilde du Bois now creeps up to the main entrance to the building. She's sure the guards are gone, and she knows that Neferu will warn her if there's any approaching danger. She has five extra dice to add to her *Ka*-based "sneak up to the house, pick the lock, and get inside" roll. Which is a good thing because it's Difficulty 4 for the whole schabang.

Deciding that it's better to be safe than sorry, Elizabeth invokes a Life-based flashback. She sets the scene:

"It's 1802, I'm standing exactly where I am now. I've been sent by the Effective Spirit of Aten to retrieve an artefact from this place. I am leaving empty handed, I didn't find it."

The revelation: Clothilde has broken into this building before. (Along with the implication that there is something special inside, which she didn't manage to find sixty years ago).

There is nothing the GM needs to follow up on, so the flashback is immediately resolved, allowing Clothilde to add a couple more dice to her pool.

Clothilde finally rolls around a dozen dice for her attempt to break into the mansion, making the Difficulty of 4 easily. She is inside the building, and wastes no time in opening a couple of windows, allowing access to her companions. They make their way to the governor's office,

just in time to find themselves confronted by an angry big cat...

... and so on from there. However I'm running a little over the twenty-four hour time limit, so a more detailed example of play will have to wait for a second edition. Thanks for reading.

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