Broken
A Supernatural Roleplaying Game
by
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Session Distribution: 4 Sessions, 2 Hours each
Ingredients: Package 2 (Law, Steel, Team)
The game requires at least three players and one judge.

Introductory Materials

There are two sorts of people: those who are ignorant of the Law and those who have been broken by it.

There is a cold, inhuman order to the world. It orders man and machine, life and matter, according to its sublime and alien rationality. It has no name but the Law. Those who know nothing of it live in blissful submission to its machinations, playing their part and fading away. For while The Law is not kind, nor is it deliberately cruel. But there are those who have been cursed by a glimpse into that cold order and they have been broken by it—their knowledge expels them from the Law's order. They are freed from the limits of their body, their personality, the very physical laws that order the world.

That freedom is terrible and empty. The broken have only choice to guide them. They can choose the path of Law, slowly stripping away their dependence on mere matter to manipulate the raw causal force that flows through the world. They can choose the path of steel, interacting with the world through the forged tools of man. Or they can choose the middle way, the path of humanity, seeking to employ the forces of steel and law in a delicate mimicry of their old life.

Breaks are mysterious occurrences. They always occur in a setting where rules have been invoked or broken and they always involve more than one person. As soon as the individual is broken, they become aware of the action of the Law around them, aware of the sensitive points through which it may be manipulated. In that near instantaneous moment, they must choose their path or have it chosen for them.

All those who are broken together are trapped on a single fault line and are carried along as it expands. The fault line extends in fit and starts, forcing the broken to leap ahead in time and sideways in space. Most broken call these sudden shifts 'jags' and live under the threat that they may be torn from their surroundings at any moment.

The Cast of Characters

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
T. S. Eliot, *The Hollow Men*

There are two sorts of characters in Broken: **bounders** (those guided by the Law) and **broken** (those freed from the Law's control). The broken must choose whether they will use law, persona, or steel to live. The forces of law and steel must be equally represented in every group of broken. In any group of broken with more than two individuals, there must also be at least one member that chooses the path of humanity, of living through a persona. Those who choose first thus have some power over those who choose after them.

The broken can interact with each other normally through touch, voice, and sight, but they can only interact with the bounded world through their chosen path.

Breaking at the Joints

Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after.
T. S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

The **fault line** carries the broken through a series of scenes where the Law's action is most centered. Each scene is connected to the first in some way, although the connection may not be obvious. Their actions have a profound impact on the course of the Law—like the proverbial butterfly whose fluttering wings result in a hurricane, the broken's actions have profound consequences which they may not be able to grasp in their entirety.

Guiding the Stream

The memory throws up high and dry
A crowd of twisted things
T. S. Eliot, *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*

Each broken character has a distinctive way with which they can interact with their surroundings. Those who have chosen the path of steel can only guide the bounded world through the use of forged metal, preferably steel. They may pick up any bounded material composed of forged metal and use it as if they were entirely corporeal. They pass through all other bounded objects (even people) as if they were ghosts.

Those who choose the path of law gain access to the causal energy that flows through the bounded world. They may choose to use this connection to make some event more likely to happen or to directly take control of a sentient bounded creature for a few brief moments. They are entirely unable to interact with the bounded world except through these mean.

Those who have chosen the path of humanity can interact with the normal world. The moment a broken chooses the path of humanity, they acquire a metal 'skeleton.' Nearby metal bends and twists, melts and reforms, and the broken's persona is infused into it. They appear to others as they were before they were broken but bounded find their presence slightly unnerving. Other broken see them as they are—a jagged collection of metal bent to human proportions, sizzling with consciousness. Those on the path of humanity can influence events more subtly than most since they, more than any other broken, may directly converse with the bounded.

What the Links Compose

In my beginning is my end…
In my end is my beginning

T. S. Eliot, *East Coker*

There are three possible conclusions to the game: transformation, stagnation, or collapse. If the players manage to alter the chain of events so that something positive arises for the bounded involved, they have achieved **transformation**. They become more independent of the Law and better able to see its patterns. If they bring about a negative change, they bring about a **collapse**. The broken become less able to see the patterns of the Law. Their ability to impact the Law deteriorates into random variation. If they neither improve nor worsen the situation of the bounded, they enter **stagnation**. They continue to jag, although often the time between increases and the connections between the events more subtle. These broken often become lost on the fault line, condemned to an eternity of change.

The Rules

The game is broken up into four two-hour sessions. The rules are organized to follow those sessions.

SESSION I
Character Generation
Estimated Time: 15-30 minutes

The judge provides each player with a player card and a copy of the introductory materials above. She hands each player a die (it doesn't matter what kind so long as every player has the same kind) and instructs the players to roll. She explains that the player with the highest roll will get to choose their path first, the second highest second, and so on. As mentioned in the introductory materials, the players must maintain a balance between the law and steel paths.

She then reads them an **opening scene** that details the moment in which the characters become broken. The players may then ask questions to help them set the scene in their mind's eye and allow them to choose a persona for their character.

As soon as a player feels they have enough information, they announce the persona that they have chosen. Once all the personas have been established, characters may select their character's paths.

After the players have determined their respective paths, they must cooperate to determine how their characters are connected. Each character must have a **connection** to *at least* one other character beyond their shared presence in the opening scene. A connection has two basic traits: a context and an action. Both players must agree on the connection before it is allowed into the game. A connection may be as simple as "bumped into each other at the grocery store" or as complex as "are childhood buddies who grew apart." In the first example, the context is the 'grocery store' and the action is 'bumped into each other.' In the second example, the context is 'childhood' while the action is 'grew apart.'

Explaining the Rules
Estimated Time: 30 minutes

The judge now goes over the rules of play. This section may be skipped if everyone is already familiar with the rules.

Each character has a resource pool of 10 points. Each time they spend one of these points, they are allowed to access one of the powers provided by their path. When they access a power, they **make a case** to the judge explaining their action and why the power they have chosen is suited to it. The case should include both the action and the intent of the action (i.e. "I want to push the chair across the room to prevent the killer from stabbing Jim" rather than "I want to push the chair across the room at the killer").

If the judge **accepts the case**, the player burns a point and determines their success. If the judge **declines the case**, she explains the reasons for her decision and the player does not lose a resource point. The judge may also chose to **clarify the case**. They provisionally decline the case but provide a set of refinements to the case that would allow it to be accepted. The player may then chose to make those refinements or accept the provisional decline.

They then roll a number of dice equal to the number of points currently in their pool to determine the success of the action. Every odd roll is treated as a success. Each power has different success requirements. In theory, the game could be played with coin flips—every roll becomes a coin flip and every tails result a success. This could be quite tedious for large pools.

This means that each action makes the next action less effective. Not only will they be rolling less dice, but also certain powers will not be accessible once they have burned too many points. In effect, the broken character 'exhausts' the potential they can access. Thankfully, this pool resets after each jag. Jags always coincide with the conclusion of a session, so players can manage their resources accordingly even though their characters are technically ignorant of this time limit. A player may never exhaust the resource pool entirely—they always have one point available.

Characters may assist each other through their connections. Whenever the player can **invoke their connection** (either context or action), they may share their dice pools. To invoke the connection, the invoking player must state why the connection applies to the current situation.

Reggie plays Firby, a security guard who is connected to Rosco the punk rocker (played by Cathy) by a 'bumped into each other at the grocery store' connection. Rosco follows the path of steel and is trying to hurl a truck in front of a door as a blockade. He needs 8 successes to do so but he does have a full resource pool. He decides to go for it.

Reggie: I invoke our connection—I'm connected to him by a 'bumping' action and Rosco is trying to 'bump' the truck.

Judge: That seems reasonable—Cathy, do you consent to the invocation.

Cathy: I do.

Judge: Ok then—since Firby has 9 points in his resource pool you can roll 19 dice.

Only the character acting needs burn the point to initiate the action. Either player in the connection may invoke it, the non-invoking member must **consent** to its invocation before the dice sharing occurs. The invoking player must make a case to the judge as to why the invocation is appropriate and the judge must accept the argument for it to occur. A player not involved in the invocation may enter a **dispute** and suggest why they think the invocation should not be allowed. The judge takes this into consideration but is not bound by it. No player may enter more than a single dispute per invocation. Neither an invocation or a dispute should require more than three sentences to formulate.

Success is binary in *Broken*. If the player exceeds their target number of successes by 50% or more, the intent of the action is honored to its fullest. For example, the truck not only blocks the door but the pursuers are also stymied and unable to act for some time since the intent of the act was to block the pursuers. If they meet or exceed the number of successes, the action goes off as expected. The truck blocks the door, although the pursuers may locate a back door, try to crawl in through windows, etc.

Failure, too, is scaled. If the player fails but achieved 75% or more of the successes required, the action still occurs but also present an opportunity contrary to the intent. The truck does blockade the door, but the pursuers can take shots at their quarry while using the truck as cover. If the player achieved 50% of the required successes, they may suggest a lesser success that, while true to the intent, does not fully achieve it. If the judge does not feel that the suggestion is appropriate, the action simply fails. The door flies off the truck and jams the doors shut, but it will only take a few moments for the pursuers to push through it. If the player does not manage to achieve at least 50% success, the action simply fails.

The judge allots resource points to their characters and they use their resources in a manner similar to the players. When the judge characters and player characters interact, the opposing side makes a roll to set the number of successes required. Over the course of the game, characters run by the judge will oppose the player characters or the player characters will oppose the judge characters. The resisting character rolls their full resource pool (no matter how many points they have burned) to set the number of successes their opponent requires but does not burn a resource point. The aggressing character must burn a resource point and makes a roll based on their current supply of resources.

Powers of the Path

All the powers listed below are suggestions. Players may use them as evidence for making a case to the judge for a different power.

Path of Humanity (Humanitarian)

Fright (1 Success): Nearby bounded catch a glimpse of the humanitarian's true nature. This uneasiness can be manipulated by future actions.

Tapping the Memory (6 Successes): Allows the character to tap into a collective humanity, acquiring the necessary knowledge to perform a task at hand. The humanitarian's successes determine how well they are able to apply the knowledge.

Conviction (8 Successes): After an extended conversation with a bounded individual, that bounded individual develops a new belief that will impact their actions in the future. This is not as direct as a driving passion, but may be more durable and capable of alteration.

Path of Law (Lawyer)

Jerk (1 Success): Introduces a slight imbalance in the causal network, making a possible event actual—a rickety chair breaks, a rusty lock jams, etc.

Tipping the Scales (2 Successes): Tweaks the probabilities of an action's success, making more or less likely. If the lawyer succeeds, they may add or subtract two from the number of successes required to achieve a result. This power is binary, unless the lawyer can make a case for it be otherwise to the judge.

Driving Passion (8 successes): Implant a driving passion in a bounded individual. They become obsessed with an idea or action. The lawyer makes a case for how the bounded individual would behave and the judge takes that into consideration.

Path of Steel (Steel-Driver)

Tap (1 Success): Moves a light forged metal object—a bottle cap, a lock, etc.

Shatter (5 Successes): A moderately sized forge metal object explodes. This likely injures those nearby, the effect rooted largely on the intent of the user.

Hand of God (8 Successes): Use their power to move a massive forged metal object—could be a truck, the girders of a building, etc. The steel-driver presents a case for how they will apply the force and the judge takes that into consideration.

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Drawing the Fault Line
Estimated Time: One Hour

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The players and judge spend the last hour of the session determining where the fault line will carry the characters. The opening scene will provide the material for the first session, but the second and third session must be negotiated. Each player should be given a copy of the session card so they can see what must be clarified. The judge generally facilitates discussion by suggesting a theme with which the players can work, although this may be unnecessary for groups more familiar with this system.

The judge proposes a theme such as "places connected to the legal establishment" or "places related to music." After the players have produced a list of about six places, the judge prompts

them for details about those locations, like what sort of action might take place there and who might be involved in it. If the players do not seem to provide much information, the judge should prime the pump, suggesting a couple answers to the questions. Any response from the players should be encouraged and met with enthusiastic counter-questions intended to elicit further clarifications and elaboration.

The judge then asks the players to narrow the choices down to four places and makes recommendations if the players seem stuck at an impasse. The judge then asks the players to formulate a dramatic impulse statement for the place that expresses a single issue that takes into account the best of their brainstorming. The dramatic impulse statement does not indicate what action should be taken in a session—it sets the stage for a number of different actions. The judge should feel free to suggest a dramatic impulse statement for each place and ask the players if it captures the action they intended. This gives them the opportunity to clarify or accept.

Finally, the judge should ask the players to eliminate one place. The final three places are recorded on the session card with their dramatic impulse. The judge will fill out the details of the session card before each session. However, the judge and players should discuss the sorts of challenges they each find most enjoyable. This allows the judge to design a session with a mixture of challenges suited to the group's preferences.

SESSIONS II-IV
(Three Jags)

Opening Scene
Estimated Time: 5 minutes

The judge begins each session with a description of the scene in which the players find themselves. They ask for further information and begin to take actions within that opening scene.

The Action
Estimated Time: 1 hour, 45 minutes

The judge will determine the sorts of challenges facing the players. In general, a session should include several set success value challenges, usually increasing with the number of players—the most difficult should require between 7 and 10 successes. In addition, the players should face a challenger capable of opposing them—usually 1 or 2 judge characters with 8 resource points and a number of lesser opponents with 2-5 resource points at their disposal.

Unless these characters are also broken, their resource pools should be clarified by the sorts of actions they perform and any other judge characters to whom they are connected. One 8 resource point bounder might be a soldier who will use their resources to deal damage (to other bounded characters in the scene since the broken are immune to such things) and manipulate his unit. He should be treated as having a connection to that unit, which makes him a force in the scene. Another 8 point bounder could be an attorney who uses their resources to acquire

warrants and assist the detective working for her. She would be considered connected to these detectives.

Remember, the players are indestructible so the action comes from their efforts to shift the unfolding drama.

The judge also establishes a set of conditions to which the players do not have access. They fall into two categories: **wellbeing conditions** and **refresh conditions**. At the end of the session, if the players have fulfilled a wellbeing condition, they acquire an ascension point. If they directly prevent a wellbeing condition from occurring by their actions, they acquire a descent point.

The refresh conditions are unique to each path. If a member of a particular path successfully performs a refresh action, their resource pool returns to full. The judge can also set unique refresh conditions for each character that should be based on their connections, motives, or background.

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Session Wrap-up
Estimated Time: 10 minutes

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Ten minutes before the end of the last session, the judge jags the players into the next scene. She reveals the ascent-descent results for the session and lets the players talk about the session freely out of character. In the last five minutes she reads the opening scene for the next session but does not answer any questions about it.

At the conclusion of session four, the judge informs the players of their characters' fates. Instead of an opening scene, she reads a closing scene that describes their ascent, descent, or stagnation. She should prepare each scene beforehand and make sure they include elements from the sessions.

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Character Card
Path
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Motive
{_____}

Background
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Connections/Notes

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Session Card

Place

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Dramatic Impulse

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Challenge Distribution

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