

HEREAFTER

MY CONDOLENCES. YOU ARE DEAD.

It's a late night, the wine has flowed, conversation is winding down, and people start throwing about the Big Questions. You're in church and the Priest begins his sermon. The Enemy is closing in. Whatever the situation, you're being confronted: What do you really believe will happen after you die? Do you think you'll see everyone you ever loved? Will you wander the shelves of an infinite library? Feast in the halls of Odin filled with brave warriors like you?

Maybe you're terrified, or maybe you're anxious for it. One thing's for sure: You *will* get an answer.

And now it's later. The cancer has metastasized. The waves close over your head. You feel the blood slow and cease flowing from the wound.

So my condolences. You're dead. What now?

What happens next is between you and your God. And by God, I of course mean, your GM! Are you recently dead, awaking in an afterlife you could never imagine? Are you a veteran traveler of the byways of the Dead? Do you need to fight your way through a legion of demons? Or do you just explore what life truly meant to you through a series of conversations with your fellow spirits? The planes of heaven and hell are vast and infinite, and so are the possibilities for play.

The Afterlife.

Shared Belief.

Some people say that life is what you make of it. Unfortunately, this simply isn't the case. Travel to Paris, and you will see the Eiffel Tower. Gravity operates the same from New York to California. For everything on Earth, some things are constant.

In the afterlife, this does not hold quite as true. The topography of it all is abstract and nebulous. However, ideas with strength, either through the belief of millions over hundreds of years, or through the simple unshakeable faith of one man shape the world them. If enough souls believe in something, such as a set of Pearly Gates, it is so. These areas are attractive to the recently dead of one set of beliefs or another, and so the architecture, landscape, and demeanor of a place is self-propagating.

Quirks.

Certain elements of the afterlife, however, are universal.

Communication.

Everyone in the afterlife can communicate with everyone else. People from 2000 B.C. to 2000 A.D. can speak to and understand one another without difficulty. Each being will interpret other beings' speech as their native tongue.

Psychomorphic Resonance.

This is a rather important concept in Hereafter. In short, belief holds sway. An easy example is the physical appearance of the deceased. How they looked in life is rather irrelevant, what matters is how they perceived themselves. Self-image is very physical. Thus, not surprisingly, the looks of men and beasts change not infrequently. A man who has been rejected -- and takes such a rejection to heart -- might find himself uglier than he was the day before, while a woman who has just completed her magnum opus may find herself brimming with tangible pride.

Planes Are Discrete.

Most people are content with where they are after death. More than content, they literally can't picture how their world could be other wise. They happily spend eternity in one place.

That lack of imagination and deep held belief in the rightness of their place in the afterlife confines them. They'll spend eternity crossing a desert, feasting in Elysian Fields, or being chewed in the maw of a vengeful god.

That's Where You Come In.

Anatomy of a Character.

This Is Why You're Different.

Some souls don't end up where they belong. Through some twist of fate or divine will, your beliefs and your new reality don't quite match. This rather disorienting experience, however, comes with an advantage. You are not bound to one place, in fact the opposite is true. Through exploration or sheer force of will, you can penetrate the barriers of a plane and step into the next. If you're very lucky, you'll be able to see just what it is before you make the jump.

So let's find out just who you are, shall we?

The Five Questions.

Before numbers get involved at all, it's important that you answer five questions that will, with luck, create a fully rounded individual, complete with an identity, hopes, dreams, and a history.

What Were You?

This question is the most simple, and should be kept to one sentence of five to ten words. It's simply a description, whether it be a physical, mental, or emotional one. At the very least, this question should answer species and demeanor.

Example 1] I Was: The finest duelist in France.

Example 2] I Was: A very good dog.

Example 3] I Was: A sports reporter for the Atlanta Tribune. I was happily married with no children.

What Did You Love?

This question dives a little bit deeper, into desire. What on Earth were you closest to? What on Earth did you love the most? Whether it be a person, an experience, an emotion, or anything else, it should be something you were driven to obtain or keep safe.

Example 1] I Loved: Wine, Women, and Song.

Example 2] I Loved: My family!

Example 3] I Loved: My husband. I loved the cold of the first football game of the season, and the smell of the diamond's freshly cut grass.

What Did You Believe?

In three sentences, what was your conception of the afterlife, before coming face to face with it? This question really consists of two.

The first two sentences should address the question of one's internal belief system. Note this is not what you used to say you believed in, but what, deep down, you knew to be true. A Catholic who had renounced God in his heart but still went to every mass and said every prayer doesn't believe in anything at all, and that's just fine.

The third and final sentence should answer the question What Do You Deserve? Within the belief system described above, where do you fall?

Example 1] I Believe: The priests were right. I have committed the sins of Lust, Avarice, Rage, and Gluttony. I deserve an eternity of torment.

Example 2] I Believe: Good boys get people food. I was a good boy. I deserve people food.

Example 3] I Believe: That life is all we had. There is nothing after death. I deserve one last day with my husband.

How, When, and Where Did You Die?

While, as with Love, there is no strict length limit on this question, do try to keep it brief. In addition to When, Where, and How you died, this question should, in part, address when, where, and how you lived.

Example 1] I Died: Stabbed through the heart by a jealous husband, in the arms of my lover, on July 14th, 1776 Anno Domine.

Example 2] I Died: In my yard. My family said it was cancer, but I was just sleepy. It was warm, but sometimes it rained.

Example 3] I Died: From complications from Pneumonia, at the age of 67. The year was 2006.

What Is Your Name?

If you're having trouble with this one, I'm impressed you've gotten this far. (No, but seriously, if you're having trouble, here's a trick a friend of mine uses. Imagine what actor would portray or voice your character. Use his or her first name, and the last name of one of their characters.)

Example 1] My Name Is: Jacques LeFevre.

Example 2] My Name Is: Lucky.

Example 3] My Name Is: Amy Stein.

The Four Suits.

For conflict resolution, Hereafter uses what we like to call the Deck of The Dead. While you will learn exactly how to use it in the next chapter, you have to make some decisions about how you'll use it right now. Sorry, like in life, some things in death aren't fair.

Clubs OR The Physical Domain.

The club is a weapon of war. At its most basic, the club represents just that: punching, shooting, stabbing, and all sorts of other nasty things. However, it covers a little bit more than that. The domain of the club encompasses all physical responses. Fighting, athletic ability, sheer brute strength, and manual dexterity. If you're touching something, you're probably using a club to do it.

Spades OR The Intellectual Domain.

The spade is a tool. It represents your ability to apply logic, reason, and good ol' fashioned know-how to a situation. If you need to answer the riddle of the Sphinx, outsmart the dumb guard standing in your way, or talk your way out of trouble, you'd better have a spade at hand.

Hearts OR The Emotional Domain.

The heart is the seat of love. Not just love, though, that too. All possible emotional responses lie in the heart of things. If you want to stir up a crowd, shed real tears, or finally tell your parents that you loved them, it's best to wear your heart on your sleeve.

Diamonds OR The Spiritual Domain.

The diamond is the hardest of all substances, and can shape the world around it. The domain of the diamond is everything you

believe in, and in the afterlife belief can change the world. If you want to call down the fires of hell, suffuse the very air with the grace of God, or just see the face of your beloved one last time, you'll want to rely on a diamond.

The Echoes of Life.

Who you were (or thought you were) in life effects who you are in death. Your skills and limitations carry over, so that some approaches to problems come more naturally to you than others. Hereafter represents this by weighting your chances for success depending on how you distribute four points among the four different suits or Domains. The points will be added to the number value of whatever card you choose to play.

Example 1] Jacques, in life, was a dashing swordsman. He lived by his sword, and thus I'm going to give him two points in clubs. However, he was also quite charming, and, despite himself, rather devout. Thus, he gets one point each in Hearts and Diamonds.

Example 2] Lucky was a good boy, and had a dog's unswerving faith in reality, as well as the heart of a champion. I'm going to give him two points in Hearts, and two points in Diamonds.

Example 3] Amy was pretty much your average Jane. She kept in shape, she was fairly bright, she loved her husband, and she knew her own mind. One point across the board.

The Deck of The Dead

Unlike in life, free will is not absolute for the dead. Buffeted by the winds of chance, they can only draw upon some of their resources at any given time. This is represented in Hereafter by The Deck of The Dead. Any time the GM calls for a draw, representing a challenge of some kind the character or characters must overcome, each player in the challenge is going to draw three cards from a standard deck of fifty two cards. Their choice from these three cards will determine three things.

First, and most simply, whether or not the character is successful. This is determined by the number showing on the card. Aces are one, kings are thirteen. This number is compared to an **obstacle number**, determined by the GM. An ON of one could be accomplished by just about anyone, while a seventeen or higher can only be passed by true masters of their suit. This is where those numbers we had you assign to your four suits in the last section come into play. If you choose a card of a suit in which you have a positive bonus, you may add that bonus to the

face value of the chosen card.

Second, the chosen card determines how the character will approach the problem at hand. Choosing a club represents a physical solution, whether or not it's successful. Likewise, spades represent the power of the mind, hearts represent an emotional appeal, and diamonds represent making some aspect of the character's belief in what the afterlife *should* be manifest.

Third, the chosen card determines narrative control. Before drawing, the drawing player will choose a color, red or black. If they select a card of the color they indicated before their draw, then they are the one to narrate their success or failure. If they choose the opposite, their fate is, for the moment, in the hands of the GM.

This system leaves a rather interesting choice in the player's hands. Would they rather narrate their failure, and thus, the consequences of it, or leave their success in the hands of another? Would they rather succeed with pure cunning and guile, or attempt a show of force and fail?

Running The Game and Closing Notes.

If you don't mind, I'm gonna get a little casual with you for a moment. This section is just some thoughts and meditations on running the game, and the design process.

Some More About the Deck of the Dead.

So, if you hadn't noticed, the conflict resolution system is a little bit abstract, a little nebulous. This is pretty intentional. It should be used less as a hard and fast way to determine a character's success or failure, and more as a prop to guide a character's actions. If the player in question can come up with a compelling way to, say, use emotions to break down a wall, let 'em do it, even if at first blush hearts hardly make much sense at all.

Goal-oriented vs. Slice of Life.

Hereafter can be run just about any way you like it. Want to fight your way out of Valhalla, winning a shard of your spirit back from the fire giants? Do it up. Or maybe the character's are just a couple of friends hanging out in an infinitely large apartment building filled with interesting people. As a GM of Hereafter, just try to suss out the kind of experience your players are after.

We Wrote This.

Mordecai Martin
&
Jack Ikard

Thanks, Alice, for letting us take over your
apartment. We're sorry we're so messy.