Anything
Helps

Introduction

This is a game about homelessness. Over the course of the game you create a diary that records the daily struggles of an imagined person living on the streets. This is a single player game that requires you to spend a few hours alone near a traffic corner as you play. The isolation, the noise of vehicles, the hard surfaces you will likely stand and sit on, and more will help immerse you in the fictional world your character faces. Your character will try to find the food and shelter needed to stay alive while you narrate the adversities and tribulations he or she encounters. This is a slow game, the pace of which is set by the cycles of a traffic light. This should give you plenty of time to really think about what your character is going through and how that makes them feel.

This is not the kind of game you play to win. It doesn't promise thrilling adventure to distract you from your mundane life. Instead the goal of the game is to leave you with a new perspective on life, an awareness of people around you who previously might have been invisible. Whether or not your character succeeds or even survives the game does not impact how much you get out of the game. As the game's only player there is no one to cheat against other than yourself. If you decide to bend, supplement, or ignore the game's rules to make things easier or harder for your character no one will tell you that you are doing it wrong. You may, however, run the risk of lessening your experience. This kind of game will not appeal to everyone and that is OK.

The rules in this book will guide you but, ultimately, the responsibility for the story you record in the diary and the experience you have falls on you, the player. The rules have attempted to strike a balance; to provide enough structure to inspire your narrative while remaining flexible enough to allow a wide range of stories to be told. You fill in the blanks left between the rules, imagining both the hard world your character will face and his or her attempts to thrive in it. If you don't play both sides of the game with equal creativity and dedication the results will be disappointing. Beyond this book and the correct mindset, the other things you will need to play are an outdoor space near a traffic light, a pencil, and couple hours.

Choosing a Space

> **Find a public outdoor space near a traffic light. Choose one direction of traffic to watch.**

Establish a play environment that is appropriate for the game. Anything Helps needs to be played in a place where vehicles stop at a traffic light. It is possible to play this game while sitting by a window in a comfortable coffee shop but doing so would rob you of a great deal of the experience. Sitting on cold hard concrete, possibly being interrupted by pedestrians, will decrease the disparity between what your character experiences and what your senses perceive. You should find a street corner in an outdoor space. It isn't necessary for it to be a bustling road with heavy traffic but a steady flow of cars is important for the game's resolution mechanic. Some public parks can make good places to play if they are near a stop light. You may stand, sit or move about your corner during play.

Once you've found a corner to play at, look at your intersection and how cars moves through it. You'll need to pick one direction of traffic, where you can see them come to a stop at the traffic light. The vehicles that stop there will be important, as explained later in this book. The intersection you select and the time of day during which you will be playing will have enormous impact of the progression of your narrative. If you decide to play this game multiple times you may want to pick different places to play it at each time.

It is also important to choose a space that is safe. You should not situate yourself in the actual road, on the curb, or otherwise too close to moving traffic. An intersection where you can observe the cars stopped at the light from a comfortable distance is necessary. Similarly, you should not come into conflict with the people around you as you play. Avoid obstructing foot traffic, trespassing on private property, or other disruptive behaviors. Some places may have laws regarding loitering in public places that need to be followed. Though the game is written for a single player, if you feel unsafe alone, choose a new space to play in or bring along companionship. Two people could play the game near each other, simultaneously but separately. If at any point consider yourself in danger, abandon the game and head for home.

You'll need to choose what to wear during the rest of the game. It is advisable to wear something comfortable, functional, and unobtrusive. You should dress for the weather, selecting hats and jackets as needed. Because this is a single player game, with you controlling both the character and his or her opposition, you never try to "become the character" as you might in a traditional roleplaying game. This is clothing, not a costume. Do not try to "look homeless" but wear articles that fit the environment you intent to play in. To do otherwise could be disrespectful of the people who are actually living on the streets. If you choose to bring a cell phone it should be silenced or turned off so that it doesn't distract you from the narrative you're creating.

Finding Your Character

> **Write a short biography**
> **describe who your character is and what they struggle with.**

The first step in playing is to decide exactly who your character is. There are no numerical stats representing your characters abilities, as might be found in a more traditional role playing game. Instead you define your character by thinking about his or her life up to this point. Different aspects of this history will inform you about your character's abilities, the resources he or she might have access to, and the problems he or she might face.

The stereotypical homeless person that most people may think of is a middle aged man, drunk and possibly crazy, with a cart full of belongings sleeping on a bench. This is one option but homelessness can be a reality for a much wider variety of people. Each situation, each combination, presents a unique mix of difficulties. As you create your character, explore other circumstances

beyond the stereotypical to really challenge yourself. Regardless of the other aspects of your character, remember that almost no one chooses a life of homelessness. He or she was forced into this situation because there were no better options available to them.

Who is your character and why is he or she homeless? Homeless people can come from all walks of life. Ethnic minorities are more likely to experience homelessness. Teens, especially homosexual or transgender youth with unaccepting families, may leave their homes due to abuse or neglect and end up on the streets. Adults in any profession may encounter a string of misfortunes they weren't prepared for, losing jobs, spouses, and homes. Elderly without caring families may find their pensions are insufficient to support them after they can no longer work. Women may take to the streets fleeing domestic or sexual abuse.

What does you character struggle with? Homelessness is incredibly difficult. Hunger and thirst might be constant threats. Weather can be dangerously hot, cold, or wet. Lack of security and privacy in public spaces can lead to debilitating sleep deprivation and precious possessions being stolen. The homeless lack, for a variety of reasons, the usual safety nets of friends and family. There is a constant threat of unwanted attention by unsympathetic people, other homeless, and police. If a homeless person has a child or other dependant to care for any difficulty is multiplied. Physical or mental illnesses or disabilities are much more common among the homeless than the rest of society and cause additional needs. Drug addiction is also present with its own array of complications.

Where does your character live? The homeless do not have a conventional home. Beyond that, though, human ingenuity and necessity drive these people to find many kinds of places where they can sleep and store the items they can't carry. Your character might bed down on the couch of one last sympathetic friend until their patience wears thin. He or she could rent a cheap motel room, at least as long as the money holds up. A car can be a serviceable living space though it will need to be moved regularly to avoid being towed. There may be charitable shelters that can provide him or her with a reasonably safe place to sleep, assuming there is room that day. Your character might have access to an abandoned or condemned building that is warmer or drier than outdoors if their presence isn't noticed by the police. If he or she resides completely in public spaces, he or she may have a place hidden in plain sight, like a stand of sense bushes at the back of a park, to camp in.

How does your character get the things they need? Ongoing human needs for clothing, food, water, and more must be met. A desperate person might satiate some of these by scrounging though it may attract negative attention. Fruit trees that are at least partially on public space can't provide a reliable source of nutrition. Digging food scraps from trash cans and drinking from park sprinkler risks contamination. Charities, soup kitchens, and free medical clinics may provide some food, clothing, or healthcare but there may be competition for these limited resources. Money, of course, improves access to all these necessities, which a homeless person might try to acquire through various methods. Your character might have a regular job of some kind, though complications of homeless life will make it difficult to keep it for long. He or she may find irregular work doing labor or scavenging resellable trash. Panhandling is an option if the law allows it and people are generous. The apparent abundance of resources possessed by others may make theft a risky temptation.

Details, Details, Details

Once you know who your character is you should write a short biography on the first page of the diary portion of this book. Feel free to add information about where you character comes from, his or her likes and dislikes, and anything else you need to make your character feel real to you. Then you'll need to extract a few relevant bit that have the greatest impact on defining your character's situation. While all of the information you've compiled on your character will inform your narrative, these details will have real mechanical weight in the game. The details you choose will affect how difficult it is for your character. Things that make life a little easier, such as a "Job with a Regular Income" or even "Self-confidence and a Winning Smile", are positive details. Negative details, like "Alcoholic" or "Wheelchair Bound", make your character's life even more difficult. You should have one to three details, which you can jot beneath your character's biography on the first page of your diary. Obviously a character that starts with three positive details will play very differently than a game that starts with three negative details. Choose details to explore the story you want. While there are plenty of examples in this book, there is no complete list of details for this game. Name them as you need while playing.

The actual gameplay will revolve around these details and other that will continually pop up. Actions your character takes, which are explained later in this book, will determine which details persist, fade into irrelevancy, or change into new details. What happens to these details will shape your narrative, as you record it in your diary. Positive details will need to be regularly maintained or they will disappear. For example, if "Owns a Car" disappears this could be reflected in the narrative by the vehicle being towed because it sat in a parking lot too long or breaking down because your character put off an oil change for too long. Negative details get more severe if your character doesn't make successful actions to deal with them. "Wet Clothing", gained after sleeping outside in the rain, could lead to "Hypothermia" if your character doesn't manage to dry off fast enough. When details change like this, the degree by which they change is very subjective. The rules can't decree that a negative detail gets worse by three units. You, as a creative player, have to decide how they get worse based on what makes sense in your narrative. Exactly what details arise and how they progress are largely up to you.

Days Go By

The game is divided into days within your narrative. At the beginning of each day you must create a new detail reflecting an immediate need your character faces. Wait until the next time the light turns red, stopping traffic that is traveling in the direction you selected earlier. Note the color of the first vehicle to stop. If it is black, grey, silver, or white then the detail you create for you character is a physical need such "Flu" or "Dirty Shirt". If the car is any other color, like green, blue, red, yellow, gold, or brown, you should create an emotional need like "Loneliness" or "Depression". If no vehicle stops before the light turns green again create two new negative details, one physical and one emotional. Exactly what detail arises is your decision. Try asking yourself what the most likely thing to go wrong might be. What would be the most interesting thing to happen?

At the beginning of every day after the first you will probably need to modify existing details. If a positive detail wasn't maintained by a successful action on the previous day, you should remove it. You will need to change any existing negative details to reflect an increasing need. "Hunger" could easily become "Starving" if your character didn't find anything to eat. When negative details change they aren't required to stay in the physical or emotional category they may have began in. A physical detail like "Out of Meds" could become an emotional one like "Delusional Paranoia".

As the day progresses your character gets to attempt five actions to deal with his or her negative details. For each of these actions you should define for yourself what detail your character is working to improve and exactly what he or she is trying to do. They should be taken one at a time, resolving the first action, as explained in the next section, before moving on to the second and so on.

Once all five actions have been resolved you should end the day by writing down a diary entry from your character's point of view. Summarize what happened to your character, what he or she tried to do and how it worked out. Include things like how your character felt. If you, as the player, got uncomfortable sitting on a landscaping boulder, were annoyed with the wind, wished your fingers weren't cold, or were yelled at by a passer-by, consider including similar experiences in your character's dairy.

Once one day ends, another begins. Go through the process another time. Create a new negative detail. Modify existing details as necessary. Resolve five more actions for your character. Write another entry in your character's diary. Repeat until the game is over.

Measuring Success

Decide which detail your character is acting on.
    Count the positive details that would make the action easier.
    Count the negative details that would make the action harder.
Determine the number of eligible cars.
    Begin with the first car to stop at the light.
        For each positive detail, add a car.
        For each negative detail, subtract a car.
Observe the color of the cars
    If no cars stop at the light, the action backfires.
        Create a new negative detail
    If all eligible cars are black, gray, silver, or white the action fails.
    If one eligible car is another color, the action succeeds.
        Eliminate the negative detail or maintain the positive detail.

Each time you character attempts an action, the success of that action is resolved using the colors of the vehicles that stop at the next red light in the direction of traffic you selected. This works very similarly to the way you decide what kind of negative detail to create at the beginning of each day with one major difference. Your character's chance of success varies depending on how the details currently in play, both positive and negative, relate to the action. If none of the details would impact the action then you would look at the color of the first car to stop to determine success. For each positive detail that would make it easier for your character to accomplish the action you may account for the color of an additional car stopped directly behind the first. For each negative aspect that would make it more difficult for the character to accomplish the action you must consider one less car. When figuring out how many cars you can consider you never include the detail that the action is trying to deal with. That means that if your character who has a "Bus Pass" and "Watch With Alarm" he or she would be more likely to succeed in eliminating "Irritated Boss" by showing up to work early, so you could look at the first vehicle that stops at the light and the next two directly behind it. Only cars that come to a stop may be considered so if only one car stops after the first before the light turns green then you only get to count two cars even if you're entitled to more. If there are more negative details than positive details, bringing the number of cars to zero or lower, then the action has no chance of success and you should try to think up something else that involves less negative details.

If all the vehicles you are allowed to consider are black, grey, silver, or white the action fails and the detail is unchanged. A negative detail like "Holes in Shoes" would remain and get worse if another
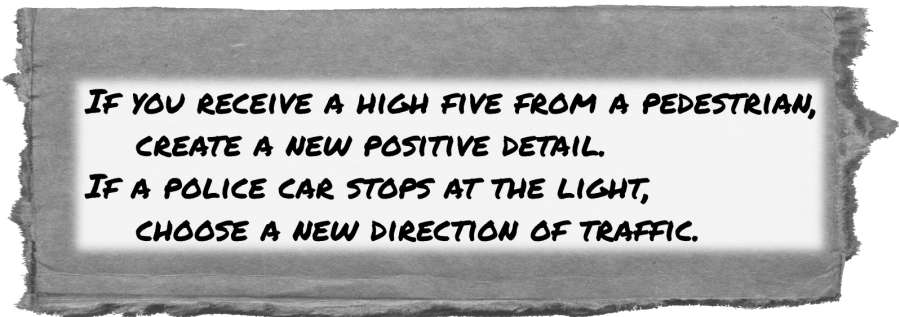
action isn't successful in dealing with it before the next day begins. Similarly a positive detail would need to be successfully maintained by another action or it would be lost the next day.

If any of the cars you can look at are another color then the action is successful. Successful actions dealing with a negative detail result in that detail being taken care of and disappearing. "Malnourished" would be eliminated if your character successfully found a good meal. Positive details are maintained by successful actions and are not in danger of vanishing at the start of the next day.

If no cars stop before the light turns green again the action backfires tragically. The detail that was being acted on is unchanged and you must add a new negative detail that makes sense in the narrative given the detail the character was trying to act on. For instance if the character was trying to maintain "Staying in Steve's Spare Room" by helpfully cooking breakfast, an accidental grease fire could result in "Steve is Pissed Off". Now the character must use another action to successfully maintain "Staying in Steve's Spare Room" or it will disappear at the beginning of the next day and do something else to placate "Steve is Pissed Off" or it will get worse.

Things Might Happen

> **If you receive a high five from a pedestrian, create a new positive detail.**
> **If a police car stops at the light, choose a new direction of traffic.**

Any time a pedestrian walks by you during play you may put up your hand, smile if you like, and say "high five". You should not say or do anything else. If the pedestrian gives you a high five then something and lucky happens to your character. You may add on new positive detail of your choosing, describing for yourself what just benefited your character. The only restriction to what positive detail your character can gain, beyond it needing to make sense in the narrative, is that you must remain homeless unless you meet the requirements described in the next section of this book.

If a police car stops at the light in the direction of traffic you chose, you must select a new direction of traffic to use. While many cops are compassionate and will help everyone they can within the bounds of their job, it is frequently their duty to enforce anti-loitering laws. The homeless must can't linger too long without their presence becoming a criminal act. If another police car stops in your new traffic direction, you must choose a third direction that you have not used before. You may not reuse a direction until you have used all the directions a your intersection.

There is a small chance that while playing someone will mistake you for a panhandler and give you money. Obviously you should not be soliciting such gifts but it might happen anyway. If this happens consider giving the money to charity. There are many worthy organizations that use donations to help the homeless.

Ending the Game

> If things death is the only way things can get worse,
>   your character dies.
> If you receive a high five after dealing with all the negative aspects,
>   you character can escape homelessness.
> If two weeks pass, the game ends without resolution.

The game can end in three ways. Your character could die, over come with negative details. He or she could escape homelessness. If neither of those things happen by the end of two weeks the game ends anyway, the fate of your character unresolved.

There may come a point where you are required to make a detail worse but, due to the overwhelming weight of a number of advanced negative details, you simply can't think of a way things could get worse other than your character dying. If that's really case, after thinking about it for a couple of minutes, let that be your character's final detail. He or she can pass away, ending the game prematurely.

If your character has a really good day, during which he or she has dealt with all the available negative aspects and maintained all the available positive aspects then if you get a high five from a passing pedestrian your character can escape homelessness. Your character's life is together enough that he or she can rent an apartment. Create a new positive aspect to reflect their new stable housing situation and end the game. Your character might have slid back into homelessness if the narrative had continued but, for the moment, they can live a normal life in a safe place.

If fourteen day pass in the game and you character remains homeless the game comes to an end for you but not for him or her. You walk away from your street corner and your character's life. He or she becomes a stranger you no longer know. For some people homelessness is a temporary circumstance but for others it is a persistent reality that lasts longer than individual relationships.

Regardless of how the game ends for you, take some time to think about what your character went through, what he or she experienced. Read through the diary your created. Be grateful that homeless is so easy for you to leave behind today.

Acknowledgements

Anything Helps Diary, Day 1

Anything Helps Diary, Day 2

Anything Helps Diary, Day 3

Anything Helps Diary, Day 4

= 8
= 25
= 9
= 3
= 15
= 1

Anything Helps Diary, Day 5

Anything Helps Diary, Day 6

Anything Helps Diary, Day 7

Anything Helps Diary, Day 8

Anything Helps Diary, Day 9

Anything Helps Diary, Day 10

Anything Helps Diary, Day 11

Anything Helps Diary, Day 12

Anything Helps Diary, Day 14