

This is how it is done.

By Sharang Biswas

Eldest has died. Together, the Family must prepare a traditional, 5-day funeral.

Having moved abroad as a child, Youngest must travel to the funeral and deliver a eulogy to their Relatives, while grappling with traditions and customs that feel alien, but that are expected of them.

Themes: death, family instability, culture clash

Players: 4-9

Space: An uncluttered play space, and a separate space where the Youngest can work alone, undisturbed

Materials: Name-tags for every player, scrap paper, pens. (NOTE: name-tags are never diegetic).

SUMMARY OF PHASES

Setup: Determine safety measures and characters.

Phase 1R: Separate from the Youngest, the Relatives decide on the family's language and customs.

Phase 1Y: Separate from the Relatives, Youngest remembers the Eldest, and writes a eulogy.

Phase 2: The funeral opening. The whole family carries out the ritual Opening of the Funeral

Phase 3: In small groups, different combinations of Relatives and the Youngest play out scenes.

Phase 4: The Eulogy. Youngest delivers their eulogy, closing the funeral.

Debrief

SETUP

Safety

Discuss and negotiate any touch and content boundaries between players. Discuss any safety mechanics the players wish to use. Lizzie Stark notes some useful safety tools in her blog:

<http://leavingmundania.com/2014/02/27/primer-safety-in-roleplaying-games/>

Characters

One player is Youngest. The rest are the Relatives. Relatives each pick from one of the following 8 roles, and everyone reads their personality traits (in Appendix I).

Elder, Side-Parent, Cross-Parent, Pre-Parent, Pro-Parent, Graft-Parent, Older, Cousin

There must always be an Elder and a Cousin.

Each other role can only be picked once.

It is recommended that the player who has read the rules play as Elder. As the oldest living Relative,

they are now considered the head of the Family and has much responsibility (both in and out of game).

Youngest picks a name for themselves and writes it on their name tag, along with the pronouns they use. Relatives should take note of this name.

Youngest now takes a writing implement and scrap paper and exits the room. They must secretly perform Phase 1Y alone, while the Relatives perform Phase 1R together.

NAMING CONVENTIONS

In this culture, what family-members call each other is traditionally dictated.

1. **Eldest:** Eldest is always referred to as "Eldest" by everyone else, and their name is never mentioned. They are also always referred to using they/them pronouns.
2. **Cousin:** Cousin refers to all the Relatives using their titles (eg: "Pre-parent") and to Youngest using their name.
3. **Youngest:** Youngest refers to everyone using their title. They are not permitted to call Relatives by their name.
4. **Relatives:** Except for Cousin, every other Relative refers to other Relatives using their names (created in Phase 1R), even when talking to Youngest about them. Relatives always refer to Youngest using "Youngest"

These conventions may bring about situations where Youngest has no idea who their Relatives are referring to, and this is by design. They may ask in character, if they wish.

PHASE 1

Phase 1 takes exactly 30 minutes, and is played semi-in-character. At the end of 30 minutes, both groups should cease their separate activities and reconvene for Phase 2. Elder is in charge of keeping time.

Phase 1 is designed so that Youngest is not aware of the content of Phase 1R and the Relatives are not aware of the contents of Phase 1Y.

PHASE 1R - RELATIVES

Relatives have a lot to do in 30 minutes, so time-keeping is important. Eldest keeps time.

1) Names, Titles and Personalities.

Each Relative writes their title ("Older", "Graft-Parent" etc.) and gender pronouns on their 1st name tag. Every player should be able to see these at all times.

Relatives then choose and write their name on a 2nd name-tag. Everyone is encouraged to use these names during Phase 1R to facilitate the learning of names.

2) Language

Relatives collectively invent the following 3 words:

- *Greeting*: a word that all family member use as a formal greeting. It is used very often, whenever family members meet. It is also used to honour Eldest (Much in the same way as one might say "Rest in Peace, Eldest")
- *Family*: a word that means "family" to be used in place of the word "family".
- *Foreign* or *Foreigner*: A word that refers to people not of the culture that Family belongs to. It is a noun meaning the quality of being foreign, an adjective meaning foreign, and a verb meaning "becoming or doing things that are foreign". It is vaguely derogatory.

The words should be used often in scenes. Not knowing them is a sign of forgetting ones' cultural roots. Relatives should practice greeting each other, and saying a sentence or two using the words. Each Relative should say each word aloud at least once.

3) Ritual

In Phase 2, players play out the Funeral Opening Ritual. Relatives design this "ancient tradition".

- a) Relatives stand in a tight ring, with one empty spot for Youngest. The centre of the ring is kept empty, representing the absence of the deceased.
- b) One by one, each Relative invents and performs a short ritual action, describing the symbolic meaning of their action. Actions should involve no intelligible speech, and other members watch silently.
- c) Youngest's action always goes last, and is created by Elder. All Relatives should remember it.
- d) Once each Relative has gone around once, they should repeat the actions in order to remember them.

4) Memories

Still in the circle, each Relative goes around and describes one brief memory they have of Eldest. Then, they announce one feeling they have about the Youngest returning from the funeral. These statements should represent characters' true feelings, and are symbolic a large amount of interaction and gossip among the family.

If there is any time remaining, Relatives should practice their names, words and ritual.

This is the end of Phase 1R. All Relatives should dispose of the name-tags that show their names (but keep the ones that show their titles).

Elder should go and fetch Youngest for Phase 2 (even if Youngest has not yet finished.)

PHASE 1Y - YOUNGEST

Youngest has 30 minutes to recall memories of the Eldest; and write a speech for the funeral.

a) Memories of Eldest

Youngest answers the following questions alone. They may write down the answers, if desired.

- What is your happiest childhood memory of spending time with Eldest?
- What life-lesson or human value did Eldest teach you and how did you learn this lesson?
- When you grew older, what moment of vulnerability made you realise that Eldest was fragile, just like every other human?
- What was the last thing Eldest said to you when you left the family to live abroad?
- Why did you not stay more in touch with Eldest?
- What emotions does Eldest's death bring up?

b) Funeral Speech

Youngest writes a 2-3 minute (or 300-400 words) speech eulogizing Eldest. Referring to their memories of Eldest, and/or their feelings about Eldest's death might be good starting points.

When Elder calls for an end to Phase 1, Youngest must comply, whether or not they have finished, and head back to the main play space.

PHASE 2 - FUNERAL

Structure of Phase 2

Phase 2 is one extended Scene involving every player. It is the opening ritual of the Funeral. All scenes from now on are conducted openly.

The scene begins with everyone but Cousin and Youngest present. The Relatives are putting the final touches to the room where the Opening Ritual is to be held. Youngest arrives soon after the scene starts, and Cousin arrives a little bit after that.

Elder should call on the Family to begin the ritual after everyone has arrived. They will also declare "END SCENE" shortly after the ritual is over, when they feel that an emotional truth has been reached, or when they feel that the narrative demands it.

Notes about Phase 2:

- Remember to use the words created in PHASE 1Y, in particular, the Greeting. It is traditional for Cousin and Youngest to greet each other Relative individually
- Cousin will be familiar with the Greeting, while Youngest will not.
- Remember to keep to the naming conventions.

PHASE 3 - SCENES

Structure of Phase 3

Phase 3 is a series of short scenes between different family members. Each scene should consist of a maximum of 4 players (3 if there are only 4

players in the game), unless otherwise noted. All scenes in Phase 3 are openly conducted.

The first scene is the following “Relative Scene”, meaning Youngest does not appear in it:

Directly after the Funeral, all the Relatives are helping clean up the room ritual chamber, gossiping about Youngest's appearance and manner, their performance during the ritual, how they've changed etc.

The next Scene is the following “Youngest Scene”, meaning Youngest must appear in it. *Youngest confides in Cousin their fears about coming back, how things have changed, and how they felt during the Opening Ritual.*

Following that, scenes alternate between Relative Scenes and Youngest Scenes, randomly chosen from Appendices II and III until every character has been in at least Youngest Scene. Then, players can collectively decide to play out one more scene of their own creation, or to move on to Phase 4.

The players collectively decide who will be in each scene. If consensus cannot be reached, Elder decides. It is also Elder's responsibility to announce "END SCENE" when they feel the emotional core of a scene has been reached.

Social Commentary

While family-members are playing a scene, the rest of the family watches, playing the role of “society”. They should try to:

1. Call for a monologue from one of the characters in-scene, if they feel the need to illuminate internal thoughts.
2. Display their approval. They should snap their fingers when they notice behaviours and comments they approve of, and hiss softly when they things they disapprove of. They may use Appendix I as a guide.

Notes about Phase 3

- Remember to use the words created in Phase 1Y, and the naming conventions
- Use Appendix I as a guide to characters' motivations, but feel free to explore your character and let them grow organically
- Feel free to reference other Relatives who are not present in a particular scene. Gossiping about each other is part of family life!

PHASE 4 - EULOGY

In Phase 4, all players gather for one final scene. Relatives huddle together and Youngest stands before them, delivering the customary eulogy to mark the end of the 5-day ceremony. Youngest does not have to stick to the speech they wrote in Phase 1R. When the speech is over, the game ends.

DEBRIEF

It is a good idea to de-roll and debrief after the game. Players can use any methods they wish. Some useful techniques are described by Lizzie Stark on her blog:

<http://leavingmundania.com/2013/12/01/run-post-larp-debrief/>

APPENDIX I: CHARACTERS & PERSONALITY

Character personalities are to be taken as guidelines and starting points. Feel free to flesh out your character as the game progresses.

Character	Age	Description
Youngest	Late 20s	You are the youngest member of the family and you moved abroad as a child. You have not kept in touch with the Family very well, and have not maintained your cultural traditions. You are unmarried.
Elder	70s	You are scared of taking on the responsibilities that come with being the oldest member of the Family, but are loathe showing it. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You approve when people are self-sufficient • You disapprove when people rely overtly on others, or pass responsibility onto others
Side-Parent	60s	You are a traditionalist and believe strongly in community and interdependence. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You approve of the family staying together, observing the traditions, acting as a strong community that helps each other. • You disapprove of ideas and behaviours you deem to be "overly individualistic"
Cross-Parent	60s	You desperately want everyone in the Family to be happy and get along. You often try to mediate conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You approve of compliments between any family member (no matter how vapid) and shows of affection • You disapprove of any family-members bad-mouthing or criticizing any other family member.
Pre-Parent	Late 50s	You are worried about Eldest's death weakening the family socially. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You approve of bringing Youngest back into the fold, giving Cousin hard lessons in growing up, or supporting Elder • You disapprove of disagreement between Family members. You expect everyone to compromise in order to keep the Family strong
Pro-Parent	Late 50s	You are overjoyed the Family is coming together, but strongly dislike one other Relative (not Youngest), for some ancient, perceived slight, forgotten by everyone but you. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You approve of any attempts to undermine or criticize that Relative • You disapprove of talk of Youngest's life abroad. Now is time for family.
Graft-Parent	Late 40s	You are very close with Eldest and somewhat resent Youngest for being (in your eyes) Eldest's favourite. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You approve of reminding Youngest that they made a mistake moving abroad, and they should pay more attention to tradition. • You disapprove of everyone focusing on their own squabbles and concerns rather than Eldest's death.
Older	Mid-Late 30s	You look down on the older Relatives, believing them to be out of touch with the modern world <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You approve of Youngest's modern, foreign sensibilities. You often ask questions about life abroad. • You disapprove of anyone who makes Youngest feel bad about shirking his responsibilities, or forgetting his roots.
Cousin	Early 30s	You're a little childish and carefree. You have little thought of the future, and expect the family to take care of you forever <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You approve of levity, playfulness and small moments of joy • You disapprove of any talk of the future, of changing roles and responsibilities

APPENDIX II: RELATIVE SCENES

1. While heading home from the market, a few Relatives discuss Youngest's marital status. Why aren't they married yet? Isn't it high time? Is something wrong with them?
2. Youngest has done a terrible job cleaning out the ritual room. A few relatives are sent to fix it, on top of their other chores.
3. Elder has a slight fever and other Relatives must take care of them. One Relative feels Eldest should rest, undisturbed, while another insists constant attention and pampering is needed.
4. Over a drink in the wee hours of the night, relatives discuss why Youngest hasn't come back to visit more often, and why they don't stay in touch.
5. An old friend (played by another player) drops by for tea and to lend a sympathetic ear in the Family's time of mourning. They bring up the issue of how all the young folk are leaving for foreign parts these days, and how sad or disgraceful it is.
6. Two Relatives conduct a ritual honouring the deceased, in order to channel Eldest's strengths and skills towards the future of the house. The Relatives are allowed to talk during the ritual.
7. A Relative made a mistake during an important ceremony (his happens "off-screen") and a few other Relatives gather to gossip about it while preparing breakfast.
8. After watching an old friend mourn Eldest (this happens "off-screen"), a few relatives contemplate the nature of life and death, and discuss their own legacies and how they have affected the Family
9. Freebie: create your own scene.

APPENDIX III: YOUNGEST SCENES

1. Youngest is sitting with some Relatives around a ritual fire. It is supposed to be a moment of quiet contemplation about the deceased, but the smoke and sitting position are making Youngest extremely uncomfortable, and they want to leave. To the Relatives, this is an important funerary ritual.
2. One of the Relatives asks Youngest to join them on a walk through the town's streets, perhaps with another relative in tow. Youngest hopes to see things from his childhood but much has changed, and not always for the better. (Other players may make cameos as townspeople)
3. Youngest is tasked with helping some Relatives cook up a feast for the family, in honour of Eldest. Youngest quickly realizes that new dietary restrictions prevent them from eating the main course, something they used to eat as a child.
4. While cleaning Youngest's room, a Relative or group of relatives find photos of the Youngest's romantic partner among their possessions. The partner is not what the Relatives expect. Youngest walks in on their Relatives discussing the photo.
5. While preparing a room for an upcoming ritual, two Relatives start angrily arguing about a family issue, and Youngest, who was helping them with the preparations, gets caught in the crossfire, trying to keep the peace.
6. A beloved family friend (played by another player) pays the family a visit and begins sharply (and perhaps snidely) criticizing Youngest's life choices in front of a few Relatives.
7. While cleaning out Eldest's old bedroom, a Relative confides their insecurities and fears with Youngest.
8. After watching an old family friend sing a hymn about the fragility of life (this happens "off-screen"), Youngest confides in a relative about their thoughts on death and a life well-lived.
9. Freebie: create your own scene

APPENDIX IV: SPECIAL THANKS

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My Family