

# THROUGH A GREAT VOID

## A Michael Meinberg LARP

*Through a Great Void* is an American freeform LARP for 2-20 players plus a coordinator. It requires these rules, a tarot deck, and a space large enough for all of the participants to be able to move around and clump together for conversations.

## Setting

Not too far in the future, a great endeavor has been taken by all of humanity. Somewhere across the impossible distance of space, a Goldilocks planet has been found; a planet with all of the conditions for a place where human life can not only live, but prosper. 10,000 brave voyagers were chosen to be the first to land on those distant shores and make a new home for humanity.

These 10,000 will be placed into cryogenic storage for the duration, with only a small crew to remain awake and make sure that nothing goes wrong during the journey. One of these is the Fool (the first of a new model of artificial life) with a humanoid frame and an AI capable of passing the Turing Test.

The rest of the crew will have enough resources to sustain them during their trek through the great void of space. Unfortunately, technology cannot prevent the aging process, so more generations will be required to crew the vessel during its century-long journey. Special genetic crèches have been placed onto the ship, where any number of people can combine their genetic material to create the seed of a new fetus, to be grown within the crèche and delivered into life as a new human and a new crewmate.

Working together, these generations will make the grandest journey in human history - searching for a new home.

## Mechanics

### Safety Mechanics

This game uses the following safety mechanics: cut and break, open door, look down, and OK check-in. Groups may choose to include additional safety mechanics, but these four are required. For more details, see Appendix 1.

### Setting Up

Before beginning the game, review any specific safety rules for the space you're using. Then print out the character descriptions in Appendix 3 and place them on a table off to the side of the room; this will be your main staging area for running the game. Next, prepare the decks for the game. Take a standard tarot deck and separate the major and minor Arcana. Shuffle the minor Arcana and place that deck on the table. Then remove the Fool and World Arcana cards. Place

the World Arcana face up in the center of the table to denote your role. Shuffle the remaining major Arcana and take from the top of the deck a number of cards equal to the total number of players. Finally, shuffle the Fool into these randomly selected Major Arcana and place that deck on the table. Place the remaining Major Arcana beneath this deck.

At the beginning of the game, gather the entire group into a single space and explain the safety mechanics and setting, then go through the remaining mechanics and answer any questions. Once all questions are answered, lead the group through character creation.

### **Character Creation**

When taking on a new persona, first draw two cards from the Major Arcana deck. After checking the character descriptions (see Appendix 3), the player then chooses one of the cards to represent their character. The other card remains face up, and the next player flips over another card to select from those two. They can expand on that character as much as desired, within the constraints of the setting. Importantly, come up with a name for this character.

If, during the initial character creation, the last player has a choice between the Fool and another card, they must select the Fool.

If the Major Arcana deck ever becomes empty, shuffle the discard pile to form a new Major Arcana deck.

After all new personas have been selected and everyone has been given a few minutes to think through their character, gather the players into a circle and have everyone introduce their character in order. After this, all players should select one friend and one rival from the other characters. If their character already has a friend or rival, these new friends and rivals are added in addition to their existing ones. If there are only two players, their relationship is complicated.

Once this process is complete, introduce the next scene.

### **Scenes**

Introduce each scene by reading the description associated with it (see Appendix 2). Each scene will present a general scenario that the vessel is in the midst of, as well as providing several questions for the players to think about during the course of the scene.

Announce that the scene is over when it feels like the conversation is dying down and any pressing discussions have been brought to a close,

Starting with the second scene, players may choose to retire their characters at the end of each scene. If the player did not retire their character when they last had a chance to do so, they must do so at the end of the current scene. For example, if a player chooses not to retire their character at the end of the second scene, they must do so at the end of the third scene.

EXCEPTION: The Fool never retires.

### **Death + Rebirth**

If a player chooses to retire their character, they may also narrate the details of their inevitable death. This step is purely optional. If they choose to do so, they first gather no more than four other players. Those chosen may opt-out if they wish. Then all players in the group who wish to narrate the death of their character then do so in the form of a short monologue. This monologue should focus on the legacy of the character and the impact that will be left behind in the wake of their passing.

While The Fool player can never be chosen for these groups, they are free to move between them and listen from a distance.

After the death monologues are finished, all players who need new characters draw new cards from the tarot deck and spend some time fleshing out their concept. Once this is done, all players of new characters introduce themselves. After each character's introduction, up to four players may volunteer to have their characters be their adoptive parent.

After these introductions are complete, move on to the next scene.

### **The Conversation + Drawing Cards**

Each scene flows through the interactions of the characters, through word and deed, as they tackle the issues presented in the scenes, their rivalries, and their friendships. If a player ever feels uncertain about how to proceed with a scene, they may choose to draw a card from the Minor Arcana and follow the instructions below, depending on court.

Swords: Start a conflict with your rival; if you feel your rivalry has cooled too much, choose another character to begin a rivalry with.

Cups: Deepen your connection with your friend, or choose another character to form a friendship with.

Wands: Come up with a secret that your character has been carrying and tell someone about it.

Coins: Devise a need for your character (something they are unable to get) and work with at least one other player to get it.

While playing, take care to respect the fiction crafted through one's interactions. More importantly, focus on making sure that everyone is having a good time; at the bare minimum, this can be achieved through following the safety mechanics.

### **Conclusions**

At the end of the fifth scene, all players may choose to perform a death monologue, including the Fool. This final death monologue should focus on the future of the colony, on its successes and failures, and the way in which this final set of characters helped bring these results into

action. The Fool, if they choose to do so, provides their death monologue to the entire group of players, while the other players use smaller groups as per normal.

After the completion of the death monologues, gather up all tarot cards currently in play and take some time for thanks and honorable mentions. If any players wish for a more structured debrief, allow them to make use of the space for that. Finally, go home and remember the stars.

## **Appendix 1: Safety Mechanics**

Safety mechanics are not optional. In addition to protecting players from content that may be harmful, it allows for players to engage with the content at the level of intensity that they desire, and to make sure that the game is fun for everyone.

**Cut and Brake:** Any player at any point may say the word “cut” and/or make a cross sign with their hands to immediately stop the current topic of discussion. If the player desires, they may negotiate how to proceed or use the look-down mechanic to leave the interaction. Alternatively, they may say the word “brake” and/or place both hands palm forward to signal that they wish for the intensity of the current discussion to be reduced. The other player then finds ways to continue the discussion at a lower level of intensity.

**Open Door:** Any player may leave the LARP any time for any reason, without question, and return if and when they feel comfortable doing so.

**Look Down:** Any player may leave an interaction for any reason by looking down and shading their eyes with a hand, or by saying the phrase “look down.” If they do so, this is not to be noted in character or out of character.

**Check In:** If a player appears to be in emotional turmoil, show them the okay symbol or says “out of character - are you okay?” That player then responds with a thumbs up or “I’m good,” a thumbs down or “I’m not good,” or a flat hand or “I don’t know.” If they respond with a thumbs up, this means that the player is doing fine and simply acting upset in character, and play can continue without interruption. A flat hand means that the player is unsure how they’re feeling, while a thumbs down means that the player is upset. In either of these cases, the querying player asks “What I can do to help you now?” and then provides the required assistance or gets staff to provide that assistance.

## **Appendix 2: Scenes**

### **Cruising Speed**

At last, the colony ship has reached its maximum velocity, hurtling forward through the great void. It is a century’s journey ahead of you all, a journey that none living will see the end of. The passengers in cryo sleep rest comfortably in the cargo hull below, and the work of setting forth is finally complete.

Now, you have time to relax and unwind and converse with your fellow crew members. Many may be strangers to you, while you may have closer relationships with some than you care for. The voices from Earth grow dimmer and more distant with every passing day, and so it's the voices around you that you will hear until the day you die.

What traditions have their start here, on the first day of cruising speed? What divisions have their seed in the interactions here? What does the rest of the crew think about the Fool - the unaging, artificial custodian of the journey?

### **Fear and Loathing**

Twenty-five years have passed since the foundations had been laid - twenty-five long years with little in the way of new company save for a few newborns and children who do not yet understand the responsibilities on your shoulders. The arguments are often circular, but they are constant and form the percussive rhythm driving life forward on a daily basis.

Habits in others that might have once been charming (or merely annoying) bloom into their fullness as irritants, grinding down with every passing moment. The closest relationships remain solid bedrocks of companionship, but even they can be tested by the continual grind of time and the erosion of complacency. This ship will be your tomb, and time's icy fingers draw closer with every passing day.

Your time to retire may come soon. Will you take that opportunity or keep working into your elderly years? How have your relationships weathered over time? How can you resolve all your lingering connections before you or they disappear?

### **New Leadership**

Another twenty-five years later, fresh blood rises to the surface, young up and comers in sharp contrast to the remaining old guard. New challenges face the crew, and the most prominent one is how leadership will proceed. When the ship set off, ranks were clear and seniority was established, but the new generation challenges that - especially with the old generation soon to fade out.

With their journey approaching its half-way point, the crew must work together to determine how they will be organized and what structures and hierarchies they will use to bring order to their lives. The decisions here will reverberate throughout the rest of the journey, and if consensus cannot be reached, then division will become the new order.

Who are you willing to follow? Who are you willing to lead? How necessary is your vision to the success of the mission? What will happen if someone else gets their way?

### **The Crisis**

Three-quarters of the way to the destination, and with twenty-five more long years passed, the reason for the crew becomes apparent. Something has gone terribly wrong in the cargo hull; a

coolant leak has sprung, and, if it is not stopped, the passengers will die and their deaths will be on your hands. Their only hope is that the crew have been trained well and are able to work together to do their hereditary duties.

The hull is a dangerous place under the best of times, but now the leak spreads toxic fumes throughout the space. Innumerable souls lie in the balance, and the pressure is enough to crush even the hardest of hearts. It is the greatest challenge that the crew has faced since setting out, but petty rivalries and divisions could threaten to tear everything apart.

Do you know what you need to do? Are you able to work together with the people you need to in order to do the job? Can you come up with a workable plan to fix the problem? Will it be enough?

### **Arrival**

Finally, the century's journey has come to a close and the vessel begins its final year of deceleration to bring it home. Soon, the passengers will begin the slow process of awakening, and set forth to create a new home for humanity on the planet below. As deceleration begins, messages from Earth begin to arrive in increasingly rapid order, piling on top of each other as the radio waves are more easily able to catch up with the ship.

Earth has been lost. Its plundered resources led to a degradation of the environment and a slow crawl towards oblivion; only a meager percentage of people found places where they can live. The world before you is a paradise compared to the fallen Earth; the seeds of its future are to be planted by you, in the choices you make in the voyage's last days.

How do you react to the loss of an Earth that you never knew? What lies in the days and years ahead of you on this new home of humanity? What words do you find room to say before the journey ends? What remains unsaid in a painful silence?

### **Appendix 3: Character Seeds**

Fool- An artificial life form, unaging and, perhaps, undying; the custodian and sole witness to the entire journey.

Magician- The creative spark, a helper with bright ideals, and the one who can figure out a new way of doing things.

High Priestess- The holder of traditions, a connection to the past, and the one who can understand the incomprehensible.

Empress- The keeper of the green, a nurturer of those that need help growing, and the one that the weak can come to for solace.

Emperor- The keeper of laws, a maker of rules, and the one who can speak with a voice of authority.

Hierophant- The unifier of ideas, a calm voice in the darkest night, and the one who can negotiate between the most disparate.

Lovers- The celebrant of connection, a lonely soul in search of others, and the one who can make a moment an eternity.

Chariot- The champion of power, a soldier without a war or a weapon, and the one who refuses to back down.

Strength- The hero of the people, a patient hunter waiting for their prey, and the one who knows when the moment is right.

Hermit- The seeker of inner truths, a loner who enjoys the loneliness, and the one who can face the dark alone.

Wheel of Fortune- The driver of motion, a ceaseless ball of energy, and the one who will make the most important decision.

Justice- The arbiter of truth, an authority figure seeking to do what is right, and the one who can see the best path.

Hanged Man- The martyr of the self, a zealot in search of a cause, and the one who can sacrifice himself for the group.

Death- The eliminator of waste, an ascetic living as simply as possible, and the one who can wipe the slate clean.

Temperance- The organizer of activities, a fastidious worker cleaning up everyone's mess, and the one who can bring everything into balance.

Devil- The tempter of souls, a gambler willing to wager it all on one spin, and the one who can steer others from their labors.

Tower- The bringer of destruction, a tempest in a tea kettle ready to explode, and the one who can knock the whole thing over.

Star- The caretaker of the young, an innocent that cannot hold onto that innocence, and the one who can see through everyone's self-delusions.

Moon- The weaver of stories, an artist trying to create that one last work, and the one who can tell anyone what they want to hear.

Sun- The scholar of clarity, a thinker that pierces the obscurities of the world, and the one who can speak uncomfortable truths and make them understood.

Judgment- The absolver of debts, a prophet of what will come next, and the one who can bring things to their final resolution.

World- The mediator, the decider of endings, and the final voice.

#### **Appendix 4: Inspirations and Thanks**

The idea of using the major Arcana as form of character creation comes from Jacqueline Bryk's *Black Sunday*. The general outline of the scene structure, with its emphasis on specific questions to be addressed, is derived from Michael Young's *A Grandiose Disaster*. The safety mechanics are borrowed from *New World Magischola* and other LearnLARP games. Erin Hawley edited and read the final text.