

# The Life, Death, and Apotheosis of Bastard Jim

A LARP in two to four acts Aleks Samoylov

## The Premise

1. You are part of a traveling troupe of actors who make a living putting on plays and improvisational performances for the enjoyment and edification of the masses. Unfortunately, you've been struggling with finances as of late. The people just don't seem to appreciate the theatre like they used to.
2. Mere hours before the scheduled performance, the proprietor of the venue informs you that a Very Important Person is likely to be in attendance and has specifically requested an "interpretation" of *The Life, Death, and Apotheosis of Bastard Jim*. While not one of you is a stranger to Bastard Jim (what thespian worth their salt wasn't raised on this grand tradition), it isn't exactly your troupe's specialty. You have a set amount of time to put the performance together and put it on in front of a live audience.

## The Rules

- The game is essentially split into two primary phases: the preparation phase (which is, in many ways, the meat and potatoes of this LARP) and the performance phase. Set a specific time for your performance to begin and allocate a specific period of time to both the preparation process and the show itself. Optionally, you can also make allowances for a prologue, wherein the characters and the situation are introduced, and an epilogue, which can take on the form of a celebration, a tense backstage meltdown, or simply the process of packing it in and moving on.
- Do your best to act out the premise and stay in character.
- Pick a cool name for your troupe. This is key.
- Be safe and respect each other.
- If someone is uncomfortable, take a time-out and help them.
- Your performance must be a breathtaking spiritual experience for all involved. Just get that done. What are you waiting for? Make the heavens weep!

## Player Roles

Players can choose between the following roles for their character. In smaller games, one character can, if the player so wishes, have more than one role (assuming that the roles do not significantly contradict one another).

Because the game is about a small, plucky theatrical troupe, specialization is only sometimes possible. *The Life, Death, and Apotheosis of Bastard Jim* is designed to be playable with two to six troupe members (although it can easily be hacked to support more) and a flexible number of optional auxiliary characters. The individual members of smaller troupes may have to wear many different hats, both literally and figuratively. It's likely that everyone in the group pitches in doing a little bit of everything: playwriting, directing, dramaturgy, stage management, tech, promotion, art/design/costuming, and, of course, the acting. Certain players can be placed in charge of one aspect of the production process or another. Ultimately, it's all about the results!

### Primary Roles

- *The Veteran* - Has been at this longer than anyone else. Usually has a lot of stories to tell, but can sometimes get hung up on past glories and failures.
- *The Neophyte* - Young, maybe a bit inexperienced, but very passionate and eager to prove themselves. Can be overconfident or used to being a big fish in a small pond.
- *The Heartthrob* - Their seemingly supernatural charisma puts butts in the chairs. They are often cast in prominent roles and heavily involved in the process of promotion. Occasionally, this leads to resentment or conflict.
- *The Ham* - Loves being the center of attention, sometimes to the detriment of the performance itself. Has a tendency to upstage the others, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Willing to fight for the roles that will give them a chance to shine.
- *The Artiste* - Is focused on artistry above all else. They care first and foremost about the quality of the performance, as compared to their own vision of what quality means, of course. Often best suited for directorial work.

- *The Manager* - The engine that drives the train, so to speak. They are practical and care more than the others about the actual survival and viability of the troupe. Their primary goal is to hold everything together and make sure that the bills get paid.

### **Optional/Auxiliary Roles**

- *The Very Important Patron* - A wealthy and/or influential person (either an actual patron/donor or an influential critic) who wants nothing more than to be transformed, or at least transported, by the performance. May be dealing with some intense personal stuff.
- *The Proprietor* - Runs the venue where the troupe is currently performing. Really wants The Very Important Patron's further patronage and/or endorsement. (Potentially a good role for a facilitator).
- *The Audience* - The production can have as many or as few audience members as makes sense and is practically possible. Players that participate as an audience member may show up for the later stages, but are free to roleplay characters of their own. An audience member is considered a player for all intents and purposes.

### **Bastard Jim - A Phenomenon**

As you well know, The Life, Death, and Apotheosis of Bastard Jim (also referred to, depending on region and school of thought, as The Saga of Bastard Jim, The Bastard's Canon, The Jimeodeon, and so on, and so forth) began to grow in popularity several centuries ago. Scholars speculate that it's been around, in one form or another, for much longer than that. This theatrical tradition's precise historical provenance is veiled in the mists of time and further obscured by volumes and volumes of apocrypha, but the tradition itself has proven remarkably resilient.

"Interpretations" of the The Saga of Bastard Jim, which are almost always unique, partially or wholly improvised performances, tend to draw on a common set of stock characters and scenes, but can vary widely in execution, tone, focus, and format. Additionally, character relationships, genders, and personalities may differ from one performance to another.

One of the most common formats for an "interpretation" is known as the Whistle. A Whistle is traditionally composed of three (occasionally four) short "acts,"

lasting about ten minutes each. These short acts can be broken up into multiple scenes, but do not have to be. The aim of a Whistle, or a Bastard's Whistle, as it is sometimes called, is to cram maximum emotional impact (or comedic value, as the case may be) into its brief time slot. Whistles are often performed as an opening act, an sort of appetizer preceding a longer, scripted play. Sometimes, several different Whistles are performed in a row, in a marathon format, especially during a festival or as part of a competition.

While the titular figure of Bastard Jim is often the central focus of the interpretations, some performances subvert this expectation and focus instead on one of the other characters in the Bastard's Canon (with Papa Ignatius and Mistress Posey being especially popular choices). Bastard Jim is usually represented in some capacity, whether by an actor, a prop, or in dialogue between other characters. *(Refer to the incomplete list of stock characters provided directly below).*

Bastard Jim is almost universally portrayed as a lone (and usually lonely) traveler who wanders from world to world in search of something that they have either lost or had never possessed in the first place. Aside from this commonality, representations of Jim vary widely. Sometimes Jim is male, sometimes female, and sometimes nonbinary. Sometimes Jim is a transcendent trickster deity and sometimes a hapless exile who spends most of their time shuffling along the darkened halls of their rusted flying ship and spouting existential poetry. Sometimes they are a buffoon, sometimes a cunning manipulator, sometimes an elderly benefactor, and sometimes a bandit. Some scholars argue that all versions of Bastard Jim are, in fact, canonical.

## Stock Characters, A Quick Reference

Over the centuries, new stock characters have been added to the Bastard's Canon with some regularity, but not all them have remained in fashion, and not all of them have caught on. Below is a short (and thus necessarily incomplete) list of some of the more common and longest running recurring roles.

- **Posey (Most often Mistress Posey or Miss Posey)** - Usually a feminine figure, and almost always in a position of power or dominance.
- **Ignatius (Usually Papa Ignatius or Mama Ignatius)** - A mysterious, often intimidating presence. Sometimes evil. Often portrayed as having supernatural powers.
- **Parson Riley** - Usually a benevolent or neutral figure. Sometimes Papa Ignatius in disguise. Sometimes an observer or everyman.
- **The Glow** - Usually a sort of Chorus. Sometimes portrayed as a spirit and sometimes as a mechanical being. Occasionally human. Often deployed when Jim needs someone to talk to about how alone and lonely they are. Rarely, but sometimes, the antagonist.
- **Thimble the Speechless** - Usually a roguish figure who loves to make mischief. Sometimes a dashing swashbuckler, and sometimes a trickster spirit. Often has attendants or cohorts.
- **Castigator Jones** - Either a judge, warrior, or rival. Very fluid role, but almost always involves conflict, often due to a misunderstanding or minor ideological misalignment. Is presented as being perpetually and inexplicably on fire somewhat more often than a lot of the other characters.
- **Mary Morning** - An entity that represents liminality or death in most interpretations. Often a sage, oracle, scholar, alchemist, or wizard. Sometimes wise and scatterbrained. Sometimes a villain. Often omniscient or possessed of universal secrets or knowledge.
- **Karen-Karen-Karen** - Usually a naive, youthful figure. Occasionally demonstrates uncommon wisdom. Sometimes a younger or older version of Bastard Jim. In some interpretations, played by three actors. Sometimes

part of a chorus.

- **Poppy Clambaker** - Sometimes an assistant to Mary Morning or another "sage" character. Usually a no-nonsense scientist or bureaucrat. Sometimes a singer or poet.
- **The Sirens** - Scenes involving the Sirens became so popular about a century back that they have begun to pop up as secondary characters in unlikely scenarios. Originally employed as antagonists. In contemporary interpretations, sometimes conflated with The Glow or Karen-Karen-Karen.
- **The Singularity** - Usually an inhuman entity or force. Sometimes a place.
- **Crow Buckthorn** - Originally introduced in an old but well documented interpretation as a stick-in-the-mud military captain who secretly just wants to cultivate flowers. Sometimes brought in as the antagonist.
- **The Palisade** - Usually a cosmic merchant of truths. Often off stage. Occasionally a lizard or a pulsating crystal that speaks directly into the minds of others.

## Stock Scenes, A Tiny Selection

- The Promenade (Bastard Jim Goes to Senior Prom)
- The Promenade (The Fruits of Paradox)
- The Shepherd of The Callow Crooks, A Distillation
- The Sirens Without (Clamouring at the Walls)
- The Sirens Within (Lamentation of Forgotten Portals)
- The Ice Moveth (Jim and Thimble, Combinators of Great Renown)
- The Wanderer of the Unhallowed Halls (The Bitter Glow)
- Posey the Mistress (Oh Boy, What a Sneer)
- Fealty and the Landless King
- A Confessional Among the Reeds (Ignatius the Burrower)
- The Masquerade that Ends Eventually
- The Brothers of the Abbey (We All Have Our Ghosts)
- Bastard Jim and The Masters of Marvel and Merit
- Apprehend the End, An Apotheosis by Dissolution
- The Pods and the Forgotten Palace, An Apotheosis Purchased
- The Hunt for the Salient Swallow
- Everybody Blooms (A Meditation)
- The Beggar and the Bastard
- The Graveyard of Failed Vessels (The Sirens, Contrite)

- The Next Leap, An Apotheosis by Metamorphosis
- Good Mourning, Gentlepeople of the Court
- The Austere Gates of Sleep
- The Master and the Marigold
- The City of Canvas Unraveled, And There Was the Gold of Ages
- The Debacle Keeps on Giving
- Man Loves Octopus
- Ground Control to Bastard Jim (Your Terrestrial Boundaries are Fallen)

### Notes For Players And Facilitators:

- Pick a timeline that works for you. This game can be played in two hours, with an hour and a half of prep and roleplay and one Whistle performance or one hour of prep and roleplay and two Whistle performances. You can scale it up as needed. It's possible to scale it down for a bit of a rushed variant. No one format is inherently superior to another. They're simply different, and may produce different experiences and results.
- Having an actual audience is not a requirement, but can be fun, and can also be a good way to involve players who want to be part of the game but may not be interested in a more intensive or participatory experience. Audience members are players/characters in their own right, even if they choose to be silent and passive.
- The game can scale in terms of level of immersion. If you have access to costumes, makeup/masks, lighting, and music, that can be a lot of fun. You may also choose to set up a crafting station and make what you can with what you've got (fashion masks with paper plates, markers, and glitter, for example. Theatre and roleplaying are both largely about the inherent magic of the willing suspension of disbelief. Keep that in mind. If you have more, by all means use it. If you have less, use what you have with conviction.

If you're facilitating a session of The Life, Death, and Apotheosis of Bastard Jim, consider what kinds of assets and resources you want to and are able to make available to your players. Prep according to your own means, the time you have available to you, and so forth. Sometimes, something as simple as a garland of Christmas lights, or a toy vulture, or some old halloween costumes you have lying around can really inject a bit of extra spice into the proceedings, but don't push yourself.

- If some of the players are a bit nervous about performing and improvising in front of other people, consider masks. Actually, consider masks in general. Masks are cool, and they can help an actor / player lose themselves in a good way.

## **An Anecdote**

This one time, three of my friends and I went to see a locally produced one-man show in a church basement. We knew it was going to be a small affair, but we weren't prepared for just how small. We were literally the only people there, an audience of four before a cast of one and a crew of two. But the show went on. It was awkward at first: four students watching a guy prance around pretending to be Miguel de Cervantes. But after about 5 minutes, everything around us disappeared, and he WAS Cervantes! Magic. Magic made possible by two or three very dedicated people with, as we later learned, almost no budget at all. Basically, what I'm trying to say is that theatre is pretty neat and I like it.