

I Have No Railgun, And I Must Scream

The world is at risk. The military is worse than useless. The only hope for humanity is the mecha corps, piloted by children and young teenagers.

Unfortunately, you're not one of them. Your sibling is on the front lines in a mech, but you're stuck at home, waiting for any news. *I Have No Railgun And I Must Scream* is a solo game about being a civilian during a world-changing conflict, humanity in mech-focused games, and growing up despite a massive threat.

Golden Cobra 2022 Dedication

This game is a love letter to *13 Sentinels: Aegis Rim* and the vulnerable, squishy humanity present on the fringes of mech games. Relationship anarchist kisses go to Meg and Vince Baker's *Powered by the Apocalypse* and Chris Bissette's *Wretched And Alone* SRDs as well. Thanks for helping me break the relationship escalator in a new and interesting way.

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How To Play

You will need a journal (this can be a physical notebook, a voice recorder, or a word processor), a deck of playing cards, and a d20.

Separate the deck of cards into the *Boss Deck* (all face cards) *Headlines Deck* (all other cards ace through ten). Put the two Jokers aside.

Create your Main Characters: the *Player Character* and the *Sibling*.

Create the *Threat* that the *Sibling* and their fellow mech pilots face on the battlefield – and that informs the news back home.

Each turn of play proceeds as follows: roll the *Events Die* and pull from the *Headlines Deck*. You will then write (or otherwise record) a diary entry about the *Player Character's* day. Your entry should be informed by these pulls, as well as previous pulls as relevant. How does the *Player Character* feel about the war? How do they deal with aftershocks on the homefront? What effects do the *Sibling's* actions have on them? Discard cards from the *Headlines Deck* once you pull them.

Every five pulls from the *Headlines Deck*, as well as every time you roll a natural twenty, pull from the *Boss Deck* in addition to the above. Incorporate the information from the *Boss Deck* as well as the *Headlines Deck* and the *Events Die*. *Boss Deck/Headlines Deck* combinations may seem odd or uncomfortable. That's ok! War creates strange situations.

Shuffle in a Joker each the first two times you pull from the *Boss Deck*. Discard cards from the *Boss Deck* once you pull them.

When you finally pull a Joker from the *Boss Deck*, write your final entry. Move on to the *Epilogue*.

Main Characters

I Have No Railgun And I Must Scream focuses primarily on two characters: the player character and their sibling. The player character is a noncombatant on the home front; their sibling is a hotshot mech pilot in the distant fight. To create your main characters, pick one or two options from the categories below, or come up with your own options

Player Character

Name: Avis, Blair, Deirdre, Emil, Hope, Jewel, Kelley, Rey, Shaun, Therese

Pronouns: she/her, they/them, he/him, se/er, xe/xir, thon/thon

Look: always scruffy, bitten nails, flyaway hairs, tired eyes, too much energy, uncomfortably tidy, rumpled school uniform, mismatched eyes, scabby knees, always in skirts, always in jeans

Other friends: Silvia the queen bee, Anderson the plant nerd, Kory the space cadet, Erica the champion swimmer, Dani the teacher's pet

Hobbies: Gardening, "inventing", bicycling, first-person shooters, farming simulators, reading, drawing, magic tricks

How do you feel about your sibling?: Look up to them, resent them, jealous of them, twin telepathy, miss them terribly

Sibling

Name: Autumn, Bonnie, Cris, Darren, Faith, Hazel, Ismael, Kelvin, Michele, Morgan

Pronouns: she/her, they/them, he/him, se/er, xe/xir, thon/thon

Look: strong shoulders, distant stare, tidy uniform, thin mouth, eyes too old for their face, scarred face, never in dress uniform, thin hands, one eye, hunched over, neat hair

Weapons (Sibling also always gets a railgun): cryo cannon, attack drones, shield generator, long-distance incinerator, energy lance

Relationship to player character: older than player character, younger than player character, twin, fighting all the time, beloved, taught me all I know, caring, missed, distant, jealous, bitter, rivalry

Other mech pilots: Pilot Wise the brownnoser, Pilot English the aristocrat, Pilot Towers the rebel, Pilot Summers the sweetheart

Threat

The world of *I Have No Railgun And I Must Scream* faces a threat only hinted at in the past. The regular military has barely made a dent in the Threat, and the mecha are the only hope for humanity. Whatever the Threat is, it's huge, alien, and can destroy buildings as though they're card towers. To create your threat, pick one or some options from the categories below, or create your own options for each category.

Type: incorporeal, armored, spiked, humanoid, many bodies in a huge amalgam, absorbent, gelatinous, fiery, nuclear, flying, burrowing, draconic, worm-like, undead, groups of rabid animals, extraplanar, magical, weird science, giant mandala, giant platonic solid, psychic, mechanistic, water-based, spreads disease, swallows humans whole, poison, wild fae, sentient buildings, gaseous, gravitational anomaly, malicious heat wave, archdemons/angels, alien mecha

Look: reflective, gorgeous, can only be seen in peripheral vision, translucent, starfish, black hole, strange colors, shifting colors, bird-like, giant human, drooling, too bright to look at, iridescent, leathery skin, scaly skin, mirror skin, slimy, constantly bleeding, too many eyes, surrounded by mist, covered in writing, wet, constantly crumbling, leaves a trail of ooze behind, presents like a house at rest, plant-like, ugly

Weapons: eye beams, noxious breath, whipping vines, sonic waves, nuclear fallout, blast waves, weather control, railgun, holy/unholy energy, psychic storms, raise dead, animal frenzy, bacchanal, flamethrower, meteor showers, stomping, eating humans/corpses, mindwipe, diseased fog, black hole, eruption, lightning bolts, cryo blast, bullet volley, disintegration

Common Name: Bloomtors, Solar Flayers, Vortex Fiends, Nondwellers, Collapsars, Macrosirens, Transdimensional Hadar, Red Birds, Hungry Giants, Matrixkin, Gigasauruses, Antivores, Glooms

Events Die

Roll the Events Die every time you pull a card from the Headlines Deck. Events on this die are smaller scale, closer to home than the headlines from the deck. If an event is rerolled, build off what happened before, but escalate it somehow - make it more intense, intimate, etc.

- 1:** School closes for the day.
- 2:** A large orange cat demands your attention. You think he might be a stray.
- 3:** A street preacher from a new faith screams at you about the end of the world - or the beginning of a new one.
- 4:** Ash falls like snow. Maybe you could build an ashman?
- 5:** Someone in your neighborhood gets arrested for dodging the emergency draft.
- 6:** Your parents argue loudly about groceries.
- 7:** The emergency sirens go off, but nothing happens. Was it a test?
- 8:** You have a nightmare about your sibling dying horribly.
- 9:** Your sibling appears in a news report about the war. They look exhausted.
- 10:** You attend a first-aid course at your school and learn how to take care of weather injuries, gunshot wounds, and broken bones.
- 11:** A new family moves in next door. They're refugees from closer to the battlefield. One of the children is your age. Maybe you could be friends?
- 12:** Your family plants a garden in case food gets scarce.

- 13:** Someone breaks into your house looking for supplies. What do they take, if anything?
- 14:** One of your friends is taken away to a newly-opened orphanage.
- 15:** You leave school early after combat gets close enough to cause minor earthquakes. What needs to be cleaned up?
- 16:** A local cult worshipping the threat is exposed and rounded up. One of your teachers is a member.
- 17:** You're asked to create a poster supporting the troops and/or mech pilots as part of a class assignment. Do you do it?
- 18:** One of your parents is drafted as part of the military supporting the mech pilots.
- 19:** The smog is so thick it feels like nighttime.
- 20:** An emergency news broadcast pops up on your tv, radio, or streaming service. Your sibling is fighting a huge, unique monster. *Draw from the Boss Deck as part of this entry.*

♣Headlines: Clubs♣

Club headlines focus mostly on research and development, weaponry on either side, and the enemy. They are also more likely to involve your character's sibling.

Ace: "[Sibling] Holds The Line At Tower Tor, Citizens Grateful Even As Their Houses Fall"

2: "New Nanotech Weapon Offers Hope For Mecha Corps"

3: "Bloody Loss Of Experimental Mecha Type Hits Military Hard"

4: "'If We Had The Funding, This War Would Be Over': Four-Star General Rails Against Mecha Corps!"

5: "[Sibling] Chosen To Head Foray Into Red Zone"

6: "Air Force Generals Debate Use Of Nuclear Weapons In "Lost Territory""

7: "National Guard Report Massive Influx Of War Widows, Orphans; Some Facilities Report Straining Under The Load"

8: "Daring-Do: [Sibling] Rescues Civilians In The Middle Of A Firefight With Nothing But Giant Mech Hands"

9: "Attack Takes Out Capitol Building, Legislature In Chaos"

10: "1 Mech Or 100 Marines: Which Would You Rather Fight?"

◆Headlines: Diamonds◆

Diamond headlines focus primarily on supply shortages, economics, and cost-benefit analysis.

Ace: "Proposed Mass Grave Site Running Up Against Zoning Concerns"

2: "Taxi, Drone, Mech: How Three Vehicles Defined One Family's Relationship With The Tech Industry"

3: "Cygnus Industries Caught Winging It With Flight Blueprints Stolen From Icarus Solutions Inc."

4: "Personal Heat Shield Generator Company Under Fire for Inhumanely Hot Warehouse Conditions"

5: "Highschoolers Flock To Afterschool Assembly-Line Jobs Under New Emergency Permissions"

6: "Breaking: Has The Housing Market Crashed Again?"

7: "Can Cryptocurrency Protect Your Assets In An Emergency? Tech Billionaire Oakley Bouquet Says Yes"

8: "In This Local Diner, Everyday Folks Are More Concerned With Deficit Than Radioactive Dust Clouds"

9: "Council Of Mech Parents Seeks \$100,000"

10: "Icarus Solutions Stock Soars After Winning Legal Battles Over Location Of Daedalus Low-Earth Orbit Weapons Platform"

♥Headlines: Hearts♥

Heart headlines primarily focus on pilot relationships, society, and emotion. They are also more likely to involve your character's sibling.

Ace: "Dying Pilot Waxes Poetic About Peach Trees, Singer-Songwriter Girlfriend, As She's Pulled From The Wreckage"

2: "Love and Mechs: Pilots Wise and English Elope In Cockpit"

3: "A Relationship To Die For: War-Widow Speed-Dating Events On The Rise"

4: "[Sibling] Tells All! Secret Life Of A Mech Pilot! Bloody Days And Sleepless Nights!"

5: "[Sibling], A Profile: The Hopes And Dreams Of A Rising Star"

6: "[Sibling] Speaks Out Against Command Treatment Of Pilots; Officers Deny Long Workdays, Constant Scrambling"

7: "Daddy Dearest! President Visits His Daughter's Mecha Corps, Brings Expensive Gifts"

8: "Pope Gives Sermon Outlining How To Effectuate Peace On Earth"

9: "[Sibling] Receives Highest Military Honor For Holding Midwestern Line"

10: "Mech 'Apocalypse' Good News For Evangelical Church, Pastor Says"

♠Headline: Spades♠

Spade headlines focus mostly on op-eds, legal and government matters, and politics of the war.

Ace: "Gubernatorial Debate: 'Mechfrastructure', Repurposed Bank Vaults, Pensions, And More!"

2: "Civic Protests As Emergency Services Grind To A Halt"

3: "Social Services Struggling With Influx Of Orphans, National Guard Steps In To Help"

4: "Soldiers on the Home Front: Why We Need More Gardeners, Composters, And Other Domestic Practitioners"

5: "Armageddon Syndrome: Studies Show Mental Health Crises Greater Risk Than Radiation Poisoning"

6: "Love In All The Wrong Places: How Has The Apocalypse Changed The Dating Game?"

7: "County Fair Delayed Due To Rain Of Ash, Organizers Confident Attendance Will Be Unaffected"

8: "Rootshock Trial Nears End, Jury Deliberates Fate of 'Death Cult' Members"

9: "President Signs Emergency Powers Bill"

10: "50 Anguished Mothers Stand Vigil As Mech Carrier Wreck Searched For Survivors"

Boss Deck

The Boss Deck contains all the face cards from the four suits, plus two Jokers added during the first two draws or natural twenties. Draw from the Boss Deck every five turns or every time you roll a natural twenty. These can be events, unique threats, armies, or even stranger things.

Jack of Clubs: Hidden Kris

Queen of Clubs: Winter of the Maze

King of Clubs: The Steel Terror

Jack of Diamonds: Day of the Halls

Queen of Diamonds: Terrible Pain

King of Diamonds: Blasphemous Crowned One

Jack of Hearts: The Ancient Rascal

Queen of Hearts: Grace of the Valley

King of Hearts: Uniform of Thunder

Jack of Spades: Bloody Shadows

Queen of Spades: Bishop Glory

King of Spades: Mother Frozen-Teeth

Red Joker: Your side wins the war, at the cost of your *Sibling* and other mech pilots. Did you first learn of the end of the war or their death? How do you grieve? What memorial gesture do you make for them every year? What scars do the *Threat* leave on the world? *Move to the Epilogue after this entry.*

Black Joker: Your side loses the war. You are reunited with your *Sibling* in refugee camps. How do you hide from the *Threat*? When does your *Sibling* open up to you about what actually happened? How are you more equipped for this world than them? *Move to the Epilogue after this entry.*

Epilogue

No matter which Joker you drew, the war ends for the *Player Character* and their *Sibling*. The invasion of the *Threat* irrevocably changes the face of the world forever. Whether humanity survives in its current form, is knocked back to the stone age, or only survives in pockets and islands across the globe, the main conflict ends. Now is the time for rebuilding.

The *Epilogue* should be handled in two parts. The first part, based on the Joker you drew, takes place immediately after the cessation of hostilities. The second part should take place five, ten, or fifteen years in the future. The *Player Character* (and possibly their *Sibling*) grew up in the shadow of a monstrous *Threat* and is now part of a "bridge" generation – those who remember the world before, but grew up in the new world. How does this shape them? What skills have they picked up? Did they ever get used to the presence of the *Threat* – perhaps even learning how to mitigate its effects?

The *Epilogue* should be a minimum of two entries, but you can write as many time skips as you choose. Perhaps, in the future, a descendant of the *Player Character* will find their ancestor's journal when an old *Threat* resurfaces...

Credits

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Note: If you would like to share your playthrough of this game with the author, send an email with the subject line "I Have No Railgun: [yourname] Playthrough" to jacquelinembryk@gmail.com with the playthrough as an attachment. I'd love to see it!



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<http://www.goldencobra.org/>