

To Abu Sami: Wages of Devastation

A Game Regarding the Effects of Fighting

by Evan Torner

Summary: Play factions, spirits, mecha, and refugees in a protracted conflict over an urban area. Experience the fighting and consequences.

Required: 4–8 players, 2–3 hours, an open area with a lot of space to maneuver, a pencil, some paper, these sheets on hand, a small bag, 10+10 tokens of 2 different colors

Optional: 2–6 animal masks, 4–6 cloaks, 2–4 prop firearms, pieces of prop armor

Retolya, a thousand-year old city nestled in a picturesque valley, has long stood as a shining desert jewel of culture and cosmopolitanism. Yet war has arrived. Malicious spirits now vie for control over the city, using towering monstrosities to destroy their enemies. Meanwhile, the populace struggles to survive and find meaning as their city collapses around them.

*The political situation is tense. Grand Dictator Yevko and **The Regime** in the far-off capitol Surret has dominated his populace with an iron fist for years. He ruled by dividing and conquering, imprisoning political opponents and blaming minorities. But soon a brave group of rebels **The Resistance** held protests, occupied public spaces, armed themselves and refused to back down. Civil war erupted. Sensing weakness amidst their neighbors, **The Zealots** have expanded their grand religious empire into Yevko's territory, preaching hate and committing atrocities in the name of their gods. A neighboring country's army **The Liberators** have chosen to take sides and stabilize the situation. Alas – distant giant countries **The Megapowers** have also gotten involved, mapping weird geopolitical objectives onto the conflict. On the ground, **The Opportunists** serve as scavengers in it for themselves and their own profit, fought off by **The Repairfolk** who struggle to keep the lights on, the water running, and the food and fuel supplies intact for **The Populace**, the residents of Retolya who haven't yet fled.*

*In the early days of the conflict, one of the factions summoned war spirits **The Soul Harvest**, thinking these unearthly beings would help them. Instead, the spirits took over each of the major warring factions for themselves, their missions now infused with additional malice and power. They can call upon 50m tall biomechanical creatures **Traumaroids**, who wreak untold devastation on city and populace alike. What will happen as they continue to pursue their goals? Who can say?*

To Begin: Explain to your fellow players that they are about ready to play a game about politics, war, and survival. The game is divided into scenes they can choose, and players will have to assume the roles of different characters. Each player will become a Faction below:

The Regime: A dictator with a bruised ego. Wants to maintain its power and control

The Resistance: Brave in their civil disobedience. Wants to stand up for democracy and inclusion

The Zealots: An invading merciless army. Want to conquer the whole area for themselves

The Liberators: An outsider army trying to keep the peace. Want to keep The Zealots from spreading.

The Megapowers: Distant empires intervening. Want to look like they're "resolving" the conflict.

The Opportunists: Scavengers & businessfolk. Want to make a quick buck off the war.

The Repairfolk: Those keeping the lights on. Wants to remain neutral & maintain infrastructure.

The Populace: Ordinary people who stuck around. Wants to survive and have hope.

Choose among the 4 Factions at the top, and add more below as you add players. Those not taken are shared collectively, especially The Populace. Each Faction *except Repairfolk & Populace* are possessed by a Soul Harvest spirit, each of which is created by their own player:

- Pick your spirit's **Name**, such as Tabya, Mendel, Ifrid, Ahsan, Kitab, Zulqa, etc.
- Pick their **Primal Element**, such as fire, time, unity, courage, water, etc.
- Pick their **Method** of getting what they want, such as Subterfuge, Flattery, Brutality, etc.
- Pick their **Totem**, which is the animal their Traumaroid resembles (corresponding to masks) and begin to think about what the Traumaroid looks like and its abilities.

The Initial Game State Is:

- The Regime's control over Retolya is slipping.
- The Resistance is mostly in hiding.
- No one has the supplies dropped at Etsh Hill.
- A damaged power station is causing blackouts.
- The Zealots impose draconian laws in The East.
- The Liberators are entrenched in The South.
- The Megapowers drop bombs on everyone.
- The Populace have hope for The Liberators

Warm-Up:

- For safety, shout "HOLD" to pause gameplay. Practice that. Take care of each other, in and out of game.
- Talk to your group a little more about any backstory they'd like to fill in about the war over Retolya, the Soul Harvest spirits, the Traumaroids, and the game procedures.
- Everyone give a short monologue about their own experiences with war.
- Everyone practice slow-motion fighting, taking great care not to hurt anyone or break anything.

The Rules:

After a player reads the Opening Monologue and then the initial game state, the group plays through a series of cycling scenes until the Survival scene comes up a 6th time, concluding the game with Abu Sami's monologue. The group must agree on the scene type, or it will default to Diplomacy. The four scene types are: **Diplomacy, Fighting, Repair, and Survival**. Their procedures are listed below.

DIPLOMACY SCENES

Soul Harvest spirits possess members of the factions to make deals and argue.

Instructions: Have each Faction except for The Populace (who simply serves drinks) introduce their diplomat, who is really a spirit in disguise. Repairfolk have a human representative, whose job it is to *try* and stay *neutral*. Set a timer for 5 minutes, then let the diplomats mingle and hatch deals for the duration of the scene. Spirits should double down on their Method to get things done. All deals are made by 3 Factions agreeing to a change in the game state, writing it out in a sentence (ex: "The Liberators have been beaten back." "The Megapowers have destroyed Etsh Hill"), and signing it with their spirit names. Things can get meta quickly. This is a polite gathering: no violence allowed, and certainly no shouting. Make deals that drive interesting plotlines for others, rather than those that drive others from the game.

Outcomes: Once the 5 minutes are over, look at the deals made. Any player may cross out any deal made if it would ruin their play experience. If players don't object to the deals, they become the new game state and are read aloud. Characters who dislike the new game state are encouraged to fight.

FIGHTING SCENES

Soul Harvest spirits summon their massive Traumaroids to fight amidst ruined city blocks.

Instructions: Clear the floor. Every player takes 2 tokens. The group agrees to having 2 spirits fight, what their token colors are. They then choose 1 respective player to play their Traumaroid (Spirits may don their optional cloaks, Traumaroids their optional armor and masks, at this time), and that player, regardless of Faction, gives them their tokens. Spirit players "hover" next to their Traumaroid players, to whom they give commands. All remaining players form a ring around the action. **First:** the Traumaroids are described in terms of their Totem as a 50m tall mecha: a massive 6-legged cat, a hunter-killer fox with blades for arms, etc. Traumaroid players should make "VMMM" noises as they move. **Second:** the spirits taunt each other briefly as their Traumaroids get into their distinctive fighting stances. **Third:** Each spirit issues their Traumaroid a command, and the Traumaroid does its best to carry it out as slow-motion fighting with no or gentle touching. Each spirit moves in time with their Traumaroid. The fighting ends once each Spirit has issued 3 commands, or a Traumaroid on either side chooses to lose. If there is a Populace or Repairfolk player in play, they may narrate (non-humorously) immediate consequences of 50m mecha crashing through the city: buses flipping, houses collapsing, powerlines snapping, etc.

Outcomes: Circulate the bag among all players except the Traumaroids. Each puts in 1 token voting in favor of 1 side or the other. The Spirits may put in 2 for their side if they somehow incorporated their Method, Primal Element, or Totem into the fight choreography. One of the fighting spirits mixes the bag and blindly draws a token at random. The team of that color wins, and gets to immediately change 1 fact about the game state (with other players having veto power). Immediately go to a Survival scene.

SURVIVAL SCENES

The Populace suffers as the Soul Harvest and Traumaroids continue to fight.

Instructions: All players except The Populace player (or volunteer) sit on the floor around said player. They rise somberly and give the improvised monologue for a spontaneously imagined member of The Populace during the conflict. The monologue should state the name, age, and occupation of the member (Ex: "I am

Telmo, Age 19, a tailor's apprentice"), and where they were during the last battle. They then should describe, in some improvised detail, what happened to them during the conflict. It is most effective to draw on the possible consequences of the most recent Traumaroid battle, including specific maneuvers and powers deployed.

Outcomes: If this Survival scene follows a Diplomacy or Repairwork scene, it can be about the hardship of life in a wartorn city, but the Populace member may live. If this follows a **Fighting Scene**, however, the member is narrating how they died. When they sit again, a player should note how many Survival scenes have elapsed and what the current game state is.

REPAIR SCENES

The Repairfolk need to keep the city running as the fighting ensues.

Instructions: The Repairfolk player (or volunteer) selects at least 1 other player to serve as a fellow Repairfolk. The two of them then describe a nightmarish and complicated infrastructure problem posed to them by the war-torn city. Some examples:

- "A Traumaroid tore open a sewer line, and the toxic waste must be contained, the line repaired."
- "There is a vital food shipment stuck behind debris from the last fight."
- "A power station for both The Regime and Resistance strongholds is out."

They agree on a problem, and all other players mime or grab fake guns, assume positions on either side of the room, and target those on the other side. As the Repairfolk mime work, they must dodge the gunfire exchanged by both sides.

Outcomes: The Repairfolk may fix the problem, and may choose to be killed or wounded during the process. The repair is added to the next game state statement.

ENDING

Once the 6th Survival scene monologue is delivered, the game is at an end.

Players may then sit in a circle and talk about the game. Each player should make a statement about how they're feeling and what they'd like to maybe talk about later. After one time around, the floor will be open for players to talk about their experiences overall. To those who feel as though this game has something to do with anime or the ongoing Syrian Civil War, the answer is "Yes."

Read Opening Monologue to Begin (*Populace*):

*"Abu Sami brews a cup of coffee and
Packs a leather satchel full of books
Every day
Before heading to work at the local university
Where he teaches philosophy*

*One day, Abu Sami hears
A tyrant refuse to back down
So when the rumbling begins
Abu Sami takes his coffee & books
And bolts his apartment door
Instead"*

Read Closing Monologue to End (*Populace*):

*"Boots shuffle, a knock at the door.
Abu Sami peers out, haggard,
Eyes bleary from the darkness
Questions come from all sides
How did he survive?"*

*Out tumble stories about the
Garden he kept and
Books he read and
Days he starved and
Nightmarish cacophonies*

*Stories of what kept him alive and
Stories that kept him alive
Alone, but alive*

Sample Soul Harvest Spirit:

Name: Nemesis
Primal Element: Lightning
Method: Blitzkrieg
Totem: Thunderbird
Faction: The Resistance

Name:
Primal Element:
Method:
Totem:
Faction:

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Current Game State:

-
-
-
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-
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Sample Populace Remaining

Name: Cristobel
Age: 29
Profession: Convenience store owner
Location: Holed up in a former market
Outcome: Killed by a heatray from a Traumaroid while running to the bathroom

Name:
Age:
Profession:
Location:
Outcome:

Name: Abu Sami
Age: 45
Profession: Scholar
Location: Apartment
Outcome: Alive

"They stayed home not because they preferred the regime
but because they did not want to risk death.

And perhaps because they did not want to see their country torn apart."

-Robert F. Worth