

STARDUST TO STARDUST

A LARP by Olivia Montoya

Stardust to Stardust is a LARP about death, grief, and possession by parasitic deities, in a weird sci-fi setting. The game is told in 5 scenes over the course of 2-3 hours. The game can accommodate 3-8 players, and requires a facilitator. It can be played in person or online. No prep is required on the part of the players, as they will build their individual identity through a combination of pre-game workshop and in-game prompts.

Content Warnings: death, grief, possession, religious/spiritual discussion, implied violence in backstory, exile from one's home community, contingency envelopes that reveal new information throughout play.

PREMISE

Thousands of years have passed since the Scattering. From the Scattering's seeds, many trees rooted across the stars. One such tree is the Meshed. You used to be Meshed, joyfully connected to all others in your underground home, cradled by the winds of thought, all contributing to an ever-shifting reality shared across all your minds. Nothing stayed static in the winds of thought, not even your appearance. The only constant was your presence there, with the others. That is, until you found yourselves host to dangerous parasitic deities. They might have infected the rest of the hive, so the others gave your your first death, the Severing, pushing you into the blinding light of the surface world to wait for the second death, the Stillness. Until then, you would be Static, with one face and one body, corporeal and of leaden feet, wandering until the Stillness took you. However, things got complicated when your parasitic deities took control of your bodies and guided you to the Oasis, where you met the other Static. Your

deities already stole your life from you. What more could they want from you?

FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

The facilitator's role in this game is to prepare the materials for play, run the simple character-building workshop, and introduce new information to the game (through contingency envelopes or private messages, depending on whether one is playing in person or online.) It is also your role to introduce any safety mechanics for the game. It is recommended you at least ensure that the Door is Always Open for players, use Cut and Brake, and have some method for Off Game Discussion.

After explaining any safety mechanics to players, guide them through character creation. The characters are assumed to not know each other, having come from different hives across the planet. Have players name their character, choose pronouns, name a role they served in their community or a relationship they had with another person, if any, and something that they left incomplete when they were Severed. Then have them choose a deity their character is possessed by from this list:

- **The Curious** - A Deity of Curiosity. Playful, naive, intrusive without being malicious. Always seeks new information.
- **The Hungry** - A Deity of Want. Ravenous, keen, fearful. Always seeking satiation in some form.
- **The Wanderer** - A Deity of Travel. Never still, always searching for something. Emanates the euphoria of wanderlust.

- **The Luminous** - A Deity of Certainty. Bright and outspoken, determined and confident. Speaker of motivation.
- **The Shadow** - A Deity of Hidden Things. Slick and silver-tongued. Only visible if it wants to be.
- **The Timid** - A Deity of Shyness. Quiet, but always says something important when it speaks. Fearful, but it is always worth the effort to draw it out.
- **The Scavenger** - A Deity of Making Do. Collector of lost and abandoned things. Kind, but wary.
- **The Glimmer** - A Deity of Hope. Always sees the light in the darkness. Kind, comforting and validating.
- **The Blunt** - A Deity of Harsh Truths. Cares not for tact, only reality. Has good intentions, and strong convictions.
- **The Maker** - A Deity of Creation. Always full of ideas. Talkative, sometimes overly talkative. Excited and fizzy.

Each deity should be used only once per game. The facilitator should explain that at any time during play, they can switch between speaking as their character and speaking as the deity possessing their character. When speaking as the deity, the player should hold up two fingers on one hand.

This game is divided into five scenes, inspired by the 5 stages of grief. Here is the list of the stages, and a rough explanation of what will happen in each.

1. **Denial** - Arrival at the Oasis. Characters will introduce themselves and learn of their deities' motives for bringing them there.
2. **Anger** - Deities will tell them about the blessings they offer, and the consequences of these choices.
3. **Bargaining** - Characters will ask questions to their deities.
4. **Depression** - Characters will consider their futures and discuss potential choices.
5. **Acceptance** - Characters will make a final choice.

Here is how to run through these scenes:

1. DENIAL

Give players 10 minutes for initial character confusion. Let them introduce themselves to each other. Tell them that they should not let their deities answer any questions yet about why they have been brought to this place, only that it is called the Oasis. Deities should encourage players to learn about each other. After 10 minutes have passed, hand one player a slip of paper with this on it:

Have your deity speak these words:

Now that you have had a chance to introduce yourselves to each other, welcome to the Oasis. You are confused and tired, we know. But here you will help each other tie up your loose ends... and perhaps choose to receive a blessing. We do not offer this choice to many. You may resent us for choosing to bring you here. You may deny our gift. This is normal, and we will give you time. But you have always been born of stardust, and to stardust you shall return.

Let players spend 5-10 minutes reacting to this, but tell them not to have their deities answer any questions about the blessings. They may say that the time for answers will come.

2. ANGER

Immediately hand a player a slip of paper with this on it:

Have your deity speak these words:

Now is the time for you to learn about the blessings we offer. For now, you will only learn about the function of these, and we will answer no other questions. Each blessing may be bestowed only once. This may make you angry, but this is also normal.

Lay out envelopes with the following contents in a place where all players can reach them. Tell them that they can only open any envelope once every 2 minutes. This is across the whole group, not per person. If playing online, put a list of available blessings in the chat and let players claim them, after which you should message the choosing player the contents.

The Blessing of Transformation

Have your deity speak these words:

The Blessing of Transformation will grant you a new role as some other aspect of the universe, your energy flowing into it and becoming it. A star, a black hole, a concept, the wind, the bonds between souls or atoms, it is your choice. You will not be sentient in the same way you are now, but you will find a sort of fulfillment in your role.

The Blessing of Infinity

Have your deity speak these words:

The Blessing of Infinity will distribute your energy across the entirety of all that is, and you shall be simultaneously a part of everything, everywhere and everywhen. A part of that will be your life here, but you will not perceive in the sense you do now. You will simply be.

The Blessing of Watching

Have your deity speak these words:

The Blessing of Watching will grant you a vast consciousness, similar to how you understand it now, but inconceivably greater. You will be a Watcher of the universe, free to perceive and remember all that is and will be, the universe perceiving itself.

The Blessing of Sleep

Have your deity speak these words:

The Blessing of Sleep will grant you indefinite rest in the heart of a black hole. Someday you may be woken up again, but you will be something new, and the world will be very different.

The Blessing of Reincarnation

Have your deity speak these words:

The Blessing of Reincarnation will have you be reborn as another of the Meshed. You will have no memories of this life, but you will have another chance to live in the collective mind space you know so well.

The Blessing of Apotheosis

Have your deity speak these words:

The Blessing of Apotheosis will make you into a god like us. You shall have all our powers, and also our needs and weaknesses. Your memories will remain, but they will feel distant, like those of another person.

The Blessing of Merging

Have your deity speak these words:

The Blessing of Merging will allow you to become one with another sentient, with the consent of that sentient. Your souls and skills and memories will intertwine, and you will become something both new and old.

The Blessing of Division

Have your deity speak these words:

The Blessing of Division will divide your soul into numerous component parts, which your choice will allow you to bestow on any number of specific other sentients.

End this scene a few minutes after all blessings have been read.

3. BARGAINING

Immediately hand a player a slip of paper with this on it:

Have your deity speak these words:

Now is the time for questions to be answered. You may not like the answers, and may desire to beg us to offer you something else, such as a return to your old life. Make your offers if you must, but our offers remain as Static as you are now.

Lay out the following envelopes on the table (or list the available questions in a text chat if playing online). Tell players that they can only ask one named question per person.

What did it mean when you said we are made of stardust?

Exactly that. The elements that make up your body were forged in the heart of a star, and fragments of your soul forged in its light. You are an amalgamation of countless materials and beings and creatures and concepts, given singularity.

Why are you offering us blessings?

Resisting entropy requires shaking things up. By accepting a blessing, the sacrifice of your potential reignites the universe.

Why have you chosen us in particular?

Your potential is especially potent, like a flame that burns brighter than most. We are like insects to your glow.

What happens if we don't pick a blessing?

Then we will leave you to your wandering. It may be years before you find your second death. You will receive a blessing when you finally become still, but it will be random, without the choice we are offering you. But you may remain yourself for a longer time. It is up to you.

What happens after we choose a blessing?

When you formally declare your choice of blessing, you will leave your body and be blessed immediately. We will remain in your body for a time, as your physicality will provide us with the energy necessary for us to choose our next cohort.

Will we ever cease to exist?

Your temporary existences and identities will always eventually end, but some part of you will always exist in some form, until the heat death of the universe. Then all shall be quiet.

What is the meaning of life?

Life is the meaning of life, as existence is the meaning of existence. Life strives against death, and existence against nonexistence. Everything else is what you make of it.

Why should we trust you to follow through on your offers?

Perhaps you shouldn't. We haven't given you any good reasons to trust us. But are you not curious? Take a risky leap of faith, and think of what you might gain.

End this scene when all characters have asked a question.

4. DEPRESSION

Tell players that when the scene begins, they will be able to choose any question from the table to ask to other characters, or make some up.

Immediately hand a player a slip of paper with this on it:

Have your deity speak these words:

Now is the time for you to face your past and future. Talk to each other. Let your prior lives inform your choices. This will be a time for you to dig deep into your emotions. It may provoke some negative feelings, but you shall emerge from your depression, and then you will make a decision what to do next.

Here are some sample questions you can put on slips of paper (or in messages) for characters to introduce to the group:

- We're Static where once we were Meshed. Is there anything that appeals about the Static nature, or does the impermanence of form call you back?
- What ties do we still have to our old lives, and what unfinished business? How can we make peace with leaving them behind?
- Do any of the blessings especially appeal to you? Why?
- Is there a blessing that you absolutely do not wish to receive? Why?
- What does it mean to exist without consciousness? Is it enough that something perceives your existence?
- If we won't be ourselves after our deaths or blessings, what was the point of our previous lives?
- What, if anything, appeals to you about becoming something totally alien to your current experience.
- Is endless existence in the same form and consciousness appealing?
- Do you disagree with the deities about the meaning of life?

End this scene when questioning has died down, it seems like no one else has much to say, and it seems like characters have mostly made their choices, or after 30 minutes have passed, whichever comes first.

5. ACCEPTANCE

Immediately hand a player a slip of paper with this on it:

Have your deity speak these words:

Now is the time for you to formally declare your chosen blessing, if you so desire. You have 15 minutes to make your declaration. When you make your declaration, only we will remain in your body, so that we may continue to speak to the others who have yet to choose.

After everyone has made a choice, give players about 5 minutes for any last words as their deities (or characters if they refuse a blessing).

NOTES

This game is very loosely inspired by Burial by Ash by Sadia Bies. It was written for the Golden Cobra Challenge 2023. It uses the 2016 ingredients (dinosaurs, ghosts, parasites, stardust) and swaps out dinosaurs for destruction & rebirth from 2017.