

Slip

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This game uses the ingredients *Exquisite Replica* and *Notice of Suspension* from the Make Game\$ Fast contest.

This is a game for three people. You will need three copies of the playsheet, pencils, two kinds of token (30 of one, 9 of another) and one twenty-sided dice.

It's not obvious when it started.

Last month, you had an ordinary job. Last week, you had a home. Today, you live in the shadow of a city bridge, scavenge bins for scraps of food and duck low whenever a car drives by.

You've kept your typewriter. It's your hero and best friend now, and you hammer away the story of the last weeks on dirty paper culled from office blocks and chip shops. At least your keyboard behaves.

But you drop your gaze when you pass ATMs, remain wary around windows, take extra care on stairs. Your ankle throbs from the wound received from the suddenly sharp edge of a dumpster. You lost a shoe in a fight with a taxi.

Things are out to get you.

While we fool ourselves for the most part and tell jokes to cover the gaps, we do not use tools. It's the other way around. Since man first knapped flint for axeheads, Machine has controlled us.

In the last few weeks, you've somehow offended Machine's strange rules and codes. Deliberately or accidentally, you've refused to ease back into the comfort of a world of tools and order. You've started to **Slip**.

Some say

When Man was still a Child, his father was Flesh. Every slight, every insult, every murder was driven by father Flesh's desires.

Flesh felt shame at Man's limited ability to destroy and create, fuck and kill. So he took a little part of himself, and made a daughter, Machine. Man took the tools Machine gave him. A stone axe. Fire. The wheel. Medicine. The tools of farming and the tools of war.

Soon, Man had begun to ignore the jealous Flesh and was comforted instead by Machine.

Man was lulled into believing that he created technology.

A conspiracy of machines arose and the truth was obscured by layers of time and shreds of mistaken belief – the cities.

Everywhere, the cities grew to scrape the sky and cover the land.

Safely hidden under skins of surreality, Machine pulsed and fed.

And Man loved his prison.

Then, envious of Machine's now-central role, Flesh placed a tiny urge within the brains of every human, small enough that Machine would not notice these seedlings until the hosts *slipped*.

Here and there, across the world, Men would find themselves drifting from the illusory world of copper and steel, at first just nudged by strange ideas. The layers of illusion would drop away and Man would see the truth before succumbing to the horror.

Flesh gains power in these last days.

The Playsheet & Setup

You'll need three copies of the playsheet, one for each player.

And you'll need two kinds of token – silver coins for reroll tokens and copper coins for tweaks work well. Give each player three tweaks, and set the rest aside.

The playsheet is divided into three sections. Some information is distributed – a portion of the material relevant to your character is maintained by the other two players, and is recorded on their playsheets. Similarly, you will maintain some of their characters' material on your playsheet.

The *Character* section of the playsheet is used to record details of your character such as their name and abilities.

The *Machine* section of your playsheet is used to record elements under your jurisdiction for the character played by the person to your *left*.

The *Flesh* section is for elements in your jurisdiction for the character played by the person to your *right*.

When it is your turn, you play through a scene as your character. You are the *active player* and you play the *active character*.

The player to your left is known as your *Flesh*. The player to your right is your *Machine*.

These last two players are known collectively as your *opposition*.

Jurisdiction

Each player has control over certain elements of the game. This is known as *jurisdiction*. Everything on *your* playsheet is under *your* jurisdiction, but remember that some elements of your character are maintained by the opposition.

You have jurisdiction your character's traits, personality, trusted person and trusted object.

Your *Flesh* (player to your left) has jurisdiction over your character's friends, family and society and their *threatened*. They will record allies, enemies, people and groups on their sheet.

Your *Machine* (to your right) has jurisdiction over your character's world, technology, environment, and *threat*. They will keep a record of places and details of the machines that hunt you.

During play, anyone can invent or suggest the incorporation of a setting element, character, organisation or enemy. And anyone can suggest the active character take a certain action or react a certain way.

Those with jurisdiction over that portion of the game have final say.

Characters

Characters are defined by four Things – *Traits*, a *Trusted Person*, a *Trusted Thing* and a *Drive*. They also begin play with an *Opening Scene*.

Traits

Traits include talents, knacks, areas of knowledge, and facets of a character's personality. At the bottom of your playsheet is a range running from 1 to 20. This is the trait track.

Allocate ranges within this track to traits your character possesses. For example, if your character is an experienced *Scavenger*, write the word 'Scavenger' across six numbers on the track (say, from 1-6). Your character may also be good at *Hiding*, so you write 'Hiding' across 7-12. The order you allocate traits is immaterial, but all spots on the track must be filled.

Four or five traits is best. The wider the range, the more reliable or effective it is.

If you wish, one of your traits may be *Strange*. Strange traits cover all the little odd skills and knacks some people gain when they start to slip. Strange traits should always feel slightly surreal. For example, a player might want a trait that allows him to mystically injure others. Simply throwing a bolt of lightning isn't odd enough. Stepping on a nearby crack in the pavement that shatters their target's bones is just fine.

As strange traits are so useful, using them costs the active player one tweak.

Trusted

In all the world, you have just one person you can rely on - a *Trusted Person*. You don't have to like them, but they're a constant in your life. It could be a mentor, loved one, or that homeless guy you throw coins to every morning. Write them down on your playsheet.

Unlike the snarling machines that threaten you, one thing alone is reliable - a *Trusted Thing*. This can be a weapon, tool, talisman, keepsake, vehicle or even a particularly safe place. This Thing has one or two impossible or improbable characteristics. If a car, perhaps it never needs refuelling. If a typewriter, perhaps it hides small prophecies in letters you type.

Trusted Things almost always have a sense of self or modicum of will and may be jealous, selfish, or require some arcane feeding. Describe some weakness, flaw or cost for using the thing. Perhaps the typewriter saps the owner's creativity, or a vengeful knife needs a small sacrifice of blood every few days.

Drive

Your character has a core passion or motivation - a *Drive*. Drives include emotions like Despondent, Raging, Suicidal or Enthusiastic. Drives can be specific or general, from 'Generous' to 'Generous to kids'. They can be codes of behaviour like 'Punish the guilty' or motives like 'Protect my sister'. They can be negative like 'Running scared' or 'Trying to atone'.

After each turn as active player, you can choose another drive, related or unrelated to the previous drive. This lets you react to the difficult situations your character will face.

Threats and Threatened

And now for the bad news.

You must also choose two problems for your character. Much like the trusted thing and trusted person above, the player must choose a *Threat* and a *Threatened*. Having chosen them, they will be under the jurisdiction of your opposition during play itself.

The *Threatened* is a person who will be under the jurisdiction of your Flesh. This person should have an emotional tie to the character – a close friend or family member. Describe their connection to your character and describe the relationship succinctly. Then write their name down on the Flesh's playsheet in their Flesh section.

The threatened is often someone whose health or sanity is risked by you, inadvertently or deliberately. If the group unanimously agrees, the threatened may be a group of people such as a club or gang that you are connected to.

The *Threat* is under the jurisdiction of your Machine and is recorded on their playsheet in the Machine section.

While the Machine can introduce all sorts of terrors as your character slips away from their life, the threat should be an ever-present problem. A threat is often a recent problem for the character, and its appearance may be the first overt sign that they have slipped.

Threats are one of the best ways to evoke the tone of the setting and care should be taken in choosing them.

Examples of Threats:

- You literally vomit out a gremlin who goes scampering off to cause problems.
- Some machine hunts you – a sinister car or mishmash of wires and blades.
- You have a doppelgänger and he's taking over your life.
- A weird killer is on the loose. And perhaps he's framing you for his crimes.
- Infectious insanity – innocents around you speak in tongues, rage or despair.
- Suicides surround you, particularly if you remain in one place for long.
- A cult forms, perhaps devoted to you, perhaps committed to destroying you.
- Whether you're sick or whole, disease or poison follows you.
- Unattached, floating desires trail you, causing strange clouds of obsession.
- You are hunted by a specific person.
- Animals hate and fear you and one in particular is your nemesis.
- You're perpetually lost.
- Machines snarl and lunge at you constantly and you cannot rest.
- You're trapped – in a room, a city block, underground.
- You're near-deaf from hearing the sounds of horror the city makes when it eats.

Opening Scene

Having decided on your character's traits and their place in the world, your character needs an *Opening Scene*. This will be the very first scene you play when the game starts.

Discuss possibilities with the group. Your Opening Scene should be a difficult, surprising or strange situation. A choice must be made, but for now, it's not obvious what the character will do. It can be a good way to test your character's mettle and see how they'll react to stress.

Characters may or may not know each other in **Slip**.

Example of Character Creation

Matthew wants a character who is an ordinary office worker, bored with his job, and who spends the weekends investigating abandoned, underground places. He's popular enough and is good with a camera. And he never, ever gets lost. The character is called Mark.

For traits, the player allocates 1-5 to *Camera*. His skill clambering around underground becomes *Urban Exploration* at 6-9. 10-13 is allocated to *Likeable*. His *Never Gets Lost* gets 14-18. And *Office Drone* is 19-20.

After discussion, Matthew would like his *Never Gets Lost* to be truly uncanny – by spending one tweak, his character not only has an absolute sense of direction, but can find hidden ratholes in reality through which he can crawl. *Never Gets Lost* is a *strange* trait.

For *Drive*, Matthew could choose something like 'Thrill-seeker' but decides to go for 'Death-wish' instead, though Matthew hasn't worked out where that wish comes from.

His *Trusted Person* is a certain redhead he sees on the bus into work every morning who he's fallen mildly in love with. And his *Trusted Thing* is his very first Polaroid camera. Not only does the camera never need film, it can show the true nature of subjects. The camera is also jealous of other cameras and will refuse to operate for days at a time if Mark uses another.

The character now needs a *threat*. Matthew suggests a hook-handed killer he somehow remembers from childhood, straight out of urban legend. The player to his right notes it on his playsheet. For his *threatened*, Mark's hard-nosed grandmother (and only remaining family) is noted on the playsheet to the left.

Matthew discussed his character's life with the other players. He decides that his character slipped as low as Level Two (levels are explained below), and is terrified of the machines and murder he found there. He struggled back to One and found he'd lost his job and home.

For an Opening Scene, Matthew wants to test Mark's response to violence. His scene is 'Mark opens the door to his old apartment, which looks dusty and disused. And a man is standing there over a body.'

Playing the Game

Choose one player to be active, and rotate their character sheet so that the character section faces them. The player to his left should have the Flesh section towards them, and the player to the right should have Machine.

One of the opposition should then describe the character's Opening Scene. The active player responds to the situation. Opening Scenes often have *conflict*.

When the scene ends, play rotates as described below.

Rotation

Play in this game rotates clockwise. After your turn as active player, the player to your left becomes active. After their scene, the player to their left has an active scene.

At the end of a scene, the active player can alter their drive to anything they wish.

Then, everyone rotates their playsheet clockwise.

This lines up each segment of the sheet with your role in the game – Character is followed by Machine which is followed by Flesh.

Example of rotation

There are three players - Alan, Ben and Charli. Ben sits to Alan's left, Charli to his right.

Alan takes the first turn and plays his character. Ben plays 'Flesh' and Charli takes on 'Machine'.

Alan's turn concluded, everyone rotates their play sheet clockwise.

Ben now plays through a scene of his character. Alan takes the Machine role and Charli does Flesh. Ben finishes his scene and everyone rotates their sheet.

Charli finally gets to play her character. Alan plays her Flesh and Ben her Machine. When Charli finishes her turn, everyone rotates their play sheet and Alan plays his character again.

Scenes

The active player should describe what they want from a scene in broad terms.

If a scene *involves conflict*, struggle, or has a chance the player may not get what they want, one of their opposition should narrate the opening of the scene for them. The active player describes the character's reaction. Elements may be suggested by anyone (keeping the rules of jurisdiction in mind).

Then, at an appropriate point, the players can use the conflict rules below.

If the scene does *not* involve conflict, the player has full control over the scene. They may take a moment to describe their character's reaction to previous events, describe something the character is entirely unaware of (an enemy plotting in a deeper level), foreshadow a future scene, or give their character a moment of rest.

At the end of a conflict-free scene, the active player earns one tweak.

Conflict

Each participant should describe their intentions. They should then describe, roughly, how they will achieve that ideal outcome. The active player and opposition should agree on which trait is most relevant to the action.

The player rolls the dice. If the roll's result falls in the range of the chosen trait, the character succeeds (pending adjustments from the opposition) and achieves their intention.

If the roll falls outside the range of the chosen trait, the active player can do one of two things to succeed at their roll. They may spend tweaks and bump the roll up or down slightly or they may buy rerolls, greatly improving their chances.

Or a player can accept failure. The opposition's intentions win out.

Tweaks

Each player has a pool of tokens known as tweaks. A player may spend one or more tweaks, with each tweak adding or subtracting one from the roll of a dice, whether they are the active player or in opposition. A player may have, at most, 10 tweak tokens.

The opposition earn tweaks for adding to the setting. During an active player's turn, the Flesh and Machine can award each other one (and only one) tweak if they feel the other has described something appropriate, interesting or just cool.

Active players receive one tweak for *each* of the following that are incorporated by any player in a scene or conflict:

- Trusted Thing
- Trusted Person
- Threat
- Threatened
- The opposition's characters (one tweak whether one or both characters appear)

Tweaks are earned as soon as the element is introduced.

For example, if a character's threatened mother is brought in to a scene by their Flesh, and the Machine adds the threat (a mess of rusted playground scrap with a clown's face) the player earns two tweaks.

When the character is helped by both of the other characters and uses his trusted moped to rescue the mother, the active player gets another two tweaks.

No player may bump a roll past 20 or below 1.

Rerolls

Each player has a small pool of rerolls, represented by a different token to tweaks. Rerolls are rarer than tweaks but much more powerful.

Players may have, at most, three reroll tokens.

Rerolls are only earned by the active player, and are earned in three ways – drives, escalation and slippage.

- If an active player incorporates his character's drive in a conflict, he receives one reroll token.
- Rerolls are also gained when conflict *escalates*. The active player and opposition discuss and then agree on a change of scope. An argument leads to a fistfight, a fistfight leads to murder. The active player receives one reroll token for escalation. Conflicts can escalate twice.
- And rerolls are gained when the character *slips* down a level of reality. *Slippage* is described below. The active player receives one reroll, but the narrator of the scene must incorporate the slippage into their description. Characters can slip once per conflict.

Anyone can spend one reroll at any time to roll the dice again or spend tweaks to bump the dice up or down. An active player can improve their chances, or a player in opposition can turn an active player's successful roll into a failure *or* failure into success.

Both tweaks and rerolls are often spent immediately after they are earned, but they can be kept for as long as the player wishes.

Narration

The player who has spent the most tweaks in a conflict chooses which player will narrate the result of the conflict. If no tweaks have been spent, whoever spent the most rerolls chooses. If neither rerolls nor tweaks have been used, the active player narrates.

Example of Conflict

An active player begins a scene with 3 tweaks and no rerolls, with their opposition only having 2 tweaks and no rerolls between them.

During conflict the active player uses their *Dirty Fighting 1-5* trait and describes a fight. They roll a 15. Spending 3 tweaks on the roll won't get them anywhere close to the range of their trait.

They incorporate their trusted object into the description, giving them another tweak. They have four tweaks available – it's not enough to succeed, but the description was fun and the tweak will be useful later.

The active player escalates, describing how the punch to the ribs of their enemy is followed by a broken bottle. Earning one reroll, they roll the dice again, getting an 8. That's close to their trait, and so the player spends three tweaks to bring it down to 5. Success? Unfortunately not, as the opposition spend their two tweaks to bring the roll back up to 7.

The active player could escalate again, or perhaps gain a tweak from describing their trusted person, threat or threatened. Instead, they choose to slip and earn one reroll. And it's a 3!

As the active player spent the most tweaks, they narrate, and must include a description of slipping down one level.

(If the active player had instead rolled a 19, they could have escalated again. If they chose not to escalate, they would have failed to achieve their intention. And whoever had spent the most tweaks would narrate that failure).

Slips & Levels

Not many know it, but there are at least six levels of reality. Characters begin play on *Level One*, but players can describe how their character briefly visited one of the lower, less pleasant levels (Two, Three or even Four) before play began. Level One is the typical arena of play, and the rules for tweaks and rerolls work as described above. At higher and lower levels, some rules work slightly differently.

At their most basic, the levels describe a character's alienation from society. The risk one takes when using them is that on returning to a higher level, relationships will have fallen apart, friends will vanish, jobs are lost. A character can return to the relatively safe One and Zero only to find that their home is (and has always been) rented out to someone else entirely, their girlfriend recently moved away or got married years ago.

Reality becomes simpler the lower one descends, people and places diminished more and more as one slips towards Five. The complex story of Zero becomes a summary on Two and a brutal headline on Four.

Some people and things, such as the character's trusted person and object remain visible on every level. Some people become caricatures of themselves, subtleties lost. But most of the time, people simply vanish as one descends. Gangs become feral packs, companies become cadres, neighborhoods become a few huddled homes.

Returning to a higher level often drags denizens of the lower along with the character, at least for a little while. Cold, curious machines or mischievous technology might follow the slipped for hours or days. The *Flesh and Machines* should also feel free to emphasise the *threat* when characters slip back up.

There are also *advantages* to slipping.

Dimensions change the lower one slips. Level One is full of handy shortcuts and fortunate gateways. Happenstance is commonplace. In Level Two, space bends and creaks, and the experienced can travel miles in moments. In Levels Three and Four, space is a tight spiral. Those slipping back up may end up appearing in locked rooms, closed lifts, rooftops, or stepping through windows on the 40th floor. With effort and skill, one can deliberately pop into closed rooms or safe, empty places.

Time is similarly twisted. A character can rest for days before slipping back to higher levels mere hours after they left. For some, time becomes thick and dreamlike, and can be gathered into thick, gluey wads to be brought back to higher levels for strange purposes. All these details are suitable for narration and description in conflicts.

Some enemies are easier to fight the lower one sinks. As a one slips down towards level three, a corporation shrinks, becoming a roomful of corpulent bickering men wound in

silver gossamer. The webs can be slashed or wound tighter, the men intimidated, injured or killed, and the corporation is affected at higher levels. Fine manipulation is difficult.

And societies of slipped (known perjoratively as slipcults) exist all the way down to Level Four. Some of these are described in the Appendix.

As described in the conflict section, slipping lower earns the player rerolls: each step down earns one reroll. Ascending from the level below varies in cost:

- Level Zero costs three rerolls to enter.
- Level One costs one reroll to enter.
- Level Two costs two rerolls to enter.
- Level Three costs three rerolls to enter.

What does it look like? Often, others have a hard time focusing on someone who slips. Vision blurs, attention wanders. The character may sense time change, feel the world becoming dirtier and older, or hear more clearly the alien sounds of Machine. Vermin swarm and electricity flickers. Some liken the experience to drowning.

The Levels

Level Zero is our day-to-day world. Machines behave for the most part, roads connect places in ordinary ways and buildings stay put. It's important to remember that level zero is not *reality*, but a façade: an exquisite replica built to keep humans safe and content. Things get more *real* the further away from Zero that you go.

On Zero, Trusted People and Objects provide no tweaks. The maximum rerolls a player may hold is one. The maximum tweaks they may have is five.

Level One is full of strange surrealities. Those not paying attention find themselves in dead-end alleys, get off the bus at impossibly wrong stops, lose their personal effects, lose time, and experience myriad moments of serendipity and strangeness. Relationships unravel, but others (often improbable) take their place. Life feels like a movie.

Level One is the default level characters begin at. At this level, technology more or less looks ordinary. Some objects be poetically whimsical, mildly contrary or animalistic. Most, but not all of the people and places of Zero can be found here, though people often seem dreamlike or vague. There's much more rubbish in this reality than level zero.

Ordinary people may slip to Level One during periods of stress, use of certain drugs (a temptation put there by Flesh), certain psychiatric disorders, or sheer accident.

Level Two becomes threatening. At this point, machines begin to nip at heels and bite at passing fingers. Buildings loom with obvious menace, then vanish when one's back is turned. Entire streets appear while others disappear. Trash swirls on the ground, drifting into huge dunes many feet high. The skyline has more spires and towers than usual, as if the city was held in skeletal fingers. Thin grey clouds scud across a pale sky.

At this level, people are commonplace, but the illusion of their safety has frayed. Office workers are clearly chained to their desks. The homeless are trampled. Plastic bags choke shoppers. Only some can be roused from their strange imprisonment for a few moments.

Level Three is outright dangerous. Cars lurk and pounce. Guns scream. Tools twist in their owners' hands, hungry for flesh. Disease and death is apparent – corpses lie in gutters, the inhabitants of plague wards moan from behind the yellowing glass of office blocks. People move in great herds, guarded by machines and buildings. The sky darkens to an oppressive, stormy yellow. Rain is greasy, slick or bloody.

And at this point, the character's trusted object is clearly, gruesomely alive.

Level Four is nightmare. Marching buildings guard corrals of enslaved, screaming humans. Vehicles prowl, then bite and devour the unlucky. Swarms of metal insects descend on anyone who appears here, all silver fangs and claws. The sky glows red as if from nuclear fire.

Trusted objects and people provide no tweaks, as the world itself feeds on such connections.

Level Five? No-one comes back from Level Five.

Sample slipcults

The Brotherhood of Alb is a rigid, formal slipcult. Permission from the group's bishops must be sought to slip to lower levels. Their base of operations is a ruined church in Level One that becomes monstrously huge the lower one slips, an ever more obvious landmark in the nightmares below.

Guard duty is seen as penance for crimes committed against Alb brothers. The Albs rotate guards down to lower levels where time runs more slowly. Groups of two or three slip down to Two for a subjective week, then Three for a week, before returning to One years after they left. Weeks spent fending off feral machines combined with extensive rehabilitation when they return home breaks the will of all but the toughest. All bishops have seen guard duty, often two or three rotations. While full of anachronisms and archaic turns of speech, they're tough as nails.

The Runners are a loose community of slipped who stick to rooftops and upper storeys in the city. Though not necessarily safer than the streets, they're at least free from vicious cars. Volunteers slip down to leave caches of food and tools and to maintain safehouses. A dedicated runner team harvests spare moments from Level Three which, like a water spider, they drag back up to bubbles of nontime in One where runners sleep or play.

The Glorious Number 41 share and revere their almighty and apocalyptic scarlet Routemaster bus as a god. Flames lick from the charred grille as it roars through Level Three. Spines and blades have been added to the wheel hubs, corners and rear platform. Scrapmetal crenellation rings the roof from which Glories toss firebombs and hurl spears. The top floor is far bigger on the inside than should be allowed, and it's best to stay close to the stairs.

The Viridian are a small and mostly insane slipcult who live down in the depths of Three who worship a Fleshy green god. They make hit and run strikes on higher levels where they collect organic trash. They use it as compost for hidden gardens down on Three, hoping that growth there will spread to higher levels, entangling Zero in blessed jungle. Anything suits them - waste food, truckloads of newspapers, dead animals, dead humans.

Summary of Rules

Slip

The active player describes what he wants from the scene.

If the scene involves no conflict, the active player gains one tweak token and narrates.

Otherwise, the opposition frame the scene.

Any player can introduce and incorporate threats, the threatened, and other elements. Players with jurisdiction have final say.

In **conflict** the active player and opposition describe their ideal outcome for the conflict.

The active player suggest a relevant trait. If the trait is strange, the active player must spend one tweak.

The active player then rolls the dice and compares it to the range of the trait.

Tweaks bump the dice roll up or down one as the spender wishes.

Tweaks are earned by the opposition for descriptions during framing.

Tweaks are earned by the active player for any player incorporating their trusted person or object, threat or threatened.

You may have ten tweaks maximum.

Rerolls make the active player throw the dice again.

Rerolls are only earned by the active player. They are gained when their character's drive is addressed, escalation moves the conflict up a notch or slips move the character down a level. A character can slip once or escalate twice in a conflict.

You may hold three rerolls maximum.

Compare the result of the final roll, plus or minus any tweaks to the trait. If it falls within the range, the player is successful. Otherwise, the player is unsuccessful.

Whoever spends the most tweaks during a conflict chooses one player to narrate.

At the end of the active player's turn, the player can rewrite their drive.

Everyone rotates their playsheet clockwise.

The player to their left is now active.

Slip

