



Until we sink...

a role playing game for 4 or 5 players by Magnus Jakobsson
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This game draws a strong inspiration from the comic books *L'île noyée* by Benoit Sokal and *Trazo de Tiza (Streak of Chalk)* by Miguelanxo Prado. In order to play you will need the included cards, a die and six tokens – pebbles, coins or similar – to use as explanation markers. Before playing gather all the players and read this entire text aloud.

Concept

All the characters are either natives or holiday guests on a tiny resort island far into the Pacific Ocean. One or two natives and two to four guests – and a fishing enthusiast, who is found dead just before the game starts – are the only people on the island. The climate is warm and pleasant, but a little humid. People keep talking of a coming storm. And the island is slowly but surely sinking into the ocean.

The game is divided into five to seven days. Each day's gaming consists of the characters sitting on the hotel patio in the evening, talking. What happens outside of these evenings is not played out, but the players can make up things which has happened and mention them in their character's conversation.

A general advice: Don't object too much. If another character states that he has seen you clean blood off your hands down by the tide mark, it's better to make up a plausible explanation rather than saying «It's a lie!».

It's impossible to leave the island before the last day. Transportation consists of a ferry which arrives every fortnight. There is a boat on the island, for rental to those of the hotel's guests which wants to go fishing, but the engine is broken. There is no cell phone reception on the island, but there is a radio. The story of the game doesn't have to be a murder mystery, but a central part of the game is creating explanations for mysterious and ominous events. The game has no winner – the players cooperate to create an exciting experience.

Event Cards

Before each evening (except the first), draw an event card and read the text out loud. Then leave the card with the text visible on the table. The card displays an event which has happened at some point since the previous evening. This event occurs in addition to events invented by the players. The explanations for these events (both those on the cards and those invented by yourselves) are left to be established by the players through their character's conversations. It's at least as important to come up with good, consistent explanations as making up new events.

Explanations can turn up the same evening as the event, or several evenings later. When you have found an explanation for an event card, put a marker on the card as a reminder. These explanations are always true! It's forbidden to have your character lie to submit a false explanation for an event card. Anyone can expand an explanation later, but you can never contradict an established truth. There are two special cards:

The card «Sport fisher found dead» should be face-up on the table at the start of the game. It cannot be explained until the last day.

The card «The island sinks» ends the game, and need no explanation. It should not be shuffled into the deck before you have played through four days (to make the game last at least five days). See the paragraph «Last day».

How to speak?

A general rule: You say what your character says. Facial expressions, body movements and similar should usually be played out physically. You may describe your character's actions when acting them out would be inconvenient or inappropriate (e.g. «I tip my drink over Mister Longbottom's head»).

Any topic is allowed. It's not necessary to speak only about the mysterious events on the island – as long as the other players are interested, you can talk about music, religion, marital problems, events in your youth – anything.

Try to immerse yourself in the situation. Every evening conversation ends as soon as two characters has left the patio. You can declare that your character is leaving at any time (you yourself may remain in silence, listening to the others). Usually another character will leave at the same time or shortly after, so no one has to wait for very long.

The other characters

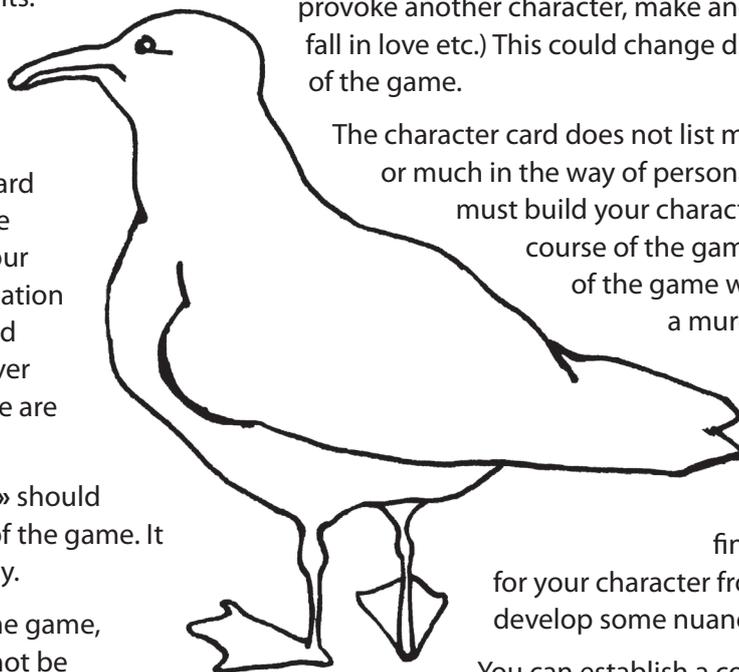
Tension between the characters is important to imbue the game with some nerve. Two important things to consider:

What is your character's opinion on each of the others? (Annoying, interesting, wise, uninteresting, scary etc.)

This could change during the course of the game.

What is your character trying to accomplish?

(Hiding dirty secrets, reveal the dirty secrets of others, provoke another character, make another character fall in love etc.) This could change during the course of the game.



The character card does not list motivation, secrets or much in the way of personality details. You must build your character during the course of the game. Maybe the end of the game will reveal you as a murderer, something which you had no idea about at the start of the game.

Even so, try to find a base mood

for your character from the start, and develop some nuances later.

You can establish a common past with one or more of the other characters during the game. This is done through regular conversation. It's fine to drop hints and be mysterious, but you have to make things clear enough to give the other player a clue as to where you're going, so he can improvise with you. (As an example, «I will never forgive what happened in Venice!» works great – the other player is left free to make up what happened in Venice, unless you do it first.)

The course of the game

Before the game starts, each player will choose a character card, read it, and make a short introduction of his character. You can add information which isn't on the card. You have to choose a gender and name for yourself. The game works better if both genders are represented. It's fine to pick characters randomly, but the cast has to include one or two natives. The cards «Sport fisher found dead» and «The island sinks» should be taken from the event deck, and put aside to be used later. Then remove eight random event cards from the deck, without looking at them. These will not be part of the game. Shuffle the last five event cards, and place them face down on the table.

The first day

Before the first day, do not draw a random event card. Instead, read the card «sport fisher found dead» out loud, and place it face up on the table. This event has occurred earlier in the day, and is a possible starting point for your conversation on the first evening – but the conversation can really turn to whatever the players prefer. In addition to discussing the death of the sport fisher, you can get to know the other characters. None of the vacationers have been on the island for very long.

A third topic: The island is sinking. This has just become common knowledge – the geologist has mentioned it, if someone is playing him. The natives have known for some time. It's supposedly several months in the future, and not dangerous at all, but even so it is an obvious (and somewhat gloomy) topic for conversation.

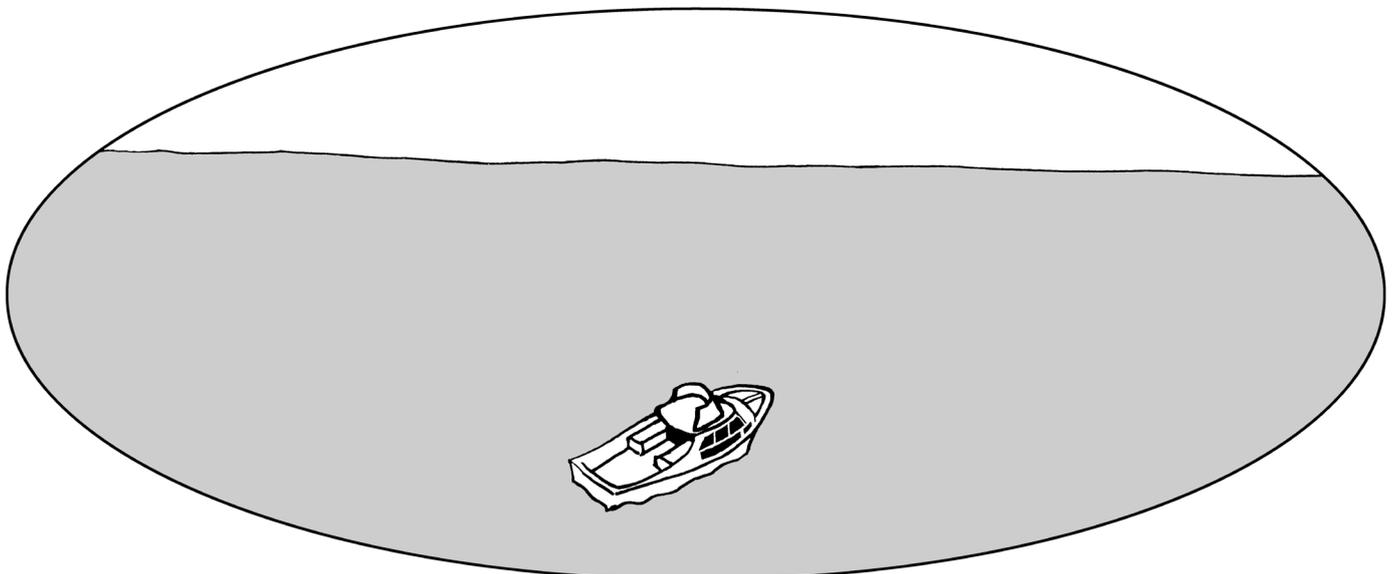
Later days

Event cards are drawn and evening conversations played out, as described above. After the fourth evening has been played out, the card «The island sinks» is shuffled into the deck.

Last day

When the card «The island sinks» has been drawn, play out a final conversation. It does not take place on the hotel patio, but on the hotel owner's boat, which drifts around on the sea with no engine. This morning you woke to ankle-high water on the ground floor, and the entire island disappeared into the sea shortly after you fled in the boat. The danger is past now: The sea is dead quiet, and the rescue crews will arrive in a few hours. But in the meantime, everything will be explained.

This last conversation can not end before all the event cards (except «The island sinks») has an explanation. It's also nice if you can find an explanation for as many as possible of the events the players invented themselves. This is the moment for drama, revelations and emotions. As soon as everything has been explained, the game can end – but there is time for a few final dramatic monologues if that would fit.



Cards

there are 15 events and 11 characters. Photocopy these cards and cut them out before playing.

Sport fisher found dead

He was the only other guest at the hotel. He was found on the beach, below a nine foot drop. His head had smashed on the rocks. Accident or murder? Did any of the characters know him?

The island is sinking

We are sitting in the hotel owner's boat, which is drifting on the ocean with no engine. This morning, we woke up with water to our ankles on the ground floor, and shortly after getting to the boat, the entire island disappeared beneath the waves. The danger is past now, the sea is dead calm, and the rescue crew will pick us up in a few hours. But in the meantime, everything will be explained.

Dead seagull on the beach

It has a needle through its head.

Gloomy vandalism

On the fresh cross on the sport fisher's grave, someone has written «swine» with black paint.

A strange greeting

On a palm tree behind the hotel, the name of one of the characters is carved, with the text «we meet again». All the players roll dice. Use the name of the one who gets the lowest number. If more than one player rolls low, those players should reroll.

The hotel radio is wet

Accident or sabotage. All communication with the outside world has been prevented. There is no cell phone reception here.

Mysterious free tickets

An envelope is found in the dead sport fisher's room. In it is his tickets to the hotel and the ferry. With them is a note, reading «Enjoy a well-deserved vacation, and write some good pieces on it afterwards. A fan.» Has any of the other characters received mysterious free tickets?

Poison?

A seagull eats some food intended for one of the characters, and dies shortly afterwards. Was the food spoiled? Or poisoned? All the players roll dice. The one with the lower roll is the one who was saved by the gull. If more than one player rolls low, those players should reroll.

A theft of underwear.

One of the character's underwear disappears. All the players roll dice. The one with the lower roll is one change of underwear short. If more than one player rolls low, those players should reroll.

Ominous local history

By the floor by the main door, one of the characters discovers a twenty year old newspaper clipping with an item on this island. It describes a murder which took place here at the time. Establish who found the clipping during the evening conversation.

A figure in the storm

There was a storm this night. Several pieces of roofing were torn off, and the boat nearly drifted off. One of the characters thought he saw the shape of a person in the night at the height of the storm. Who could it have been, and what was he or she doing? All the players roll dice. The one with the lower roll saw the figure. If more than one player rolls low, those players should reroll.

Femur

On a walk around the island, one of the characters trip over something sticking out of the ground. On closer inspection, it turns out to be a human bone! Establish who found it during the evening conversation.

Strangers

Two strangers arrived at the island this morning. They were bullying, rude and, as time passed, drunk. A few hours later, their boat was gone. They didn't announce their departure, and no one saw them leave. Which one of us had something to do with them? What happened? Was this a coincidence, or did they come for something in particular?

A lie

By a coincidence, it is revealed that a character has been lying. All the players roll dice. The one with the lower roll has been lying. If more than one player rolls low, those players should reroll. The liar himself must choose what he has been lying about, and how it is revealed. He may improvise something he has been lying about. This card has been explained when it is revealed why he lied.

Private conversation

A character has witnessed a private scene, or heard a private conversation between two other characters, without catching the full context. All the players roll dice. The one with the lower roll has heard or seen something he was not supposed to. If more than one player rolls low, those players should reroll. The witness chooses which two characters he has heard or seen. What he has heard or seen must be established through this evening's conversation.

Manager

- *You are cool, calm and distant – on the surface.*
- *You take care of the hotel administration.*
- *You are attractive.*
- *You are a native.*

Caretaker

- *You are big, dirty and a little stupid.*
- *You take care of the practical tasks around the hotel.*
- *You are easily swayed by strong emotions.*
- *You are a native.*

Hotel owner

- You are old, and the hotel is your life.
- In years past, you have seen the sea slowly swallow the island, and the people leave.
- You are a native.

Gossiping retiree.

- You came here to meet people, but are disappointed by how few are here.
- You are curious and fond of gossip.
- You are worldly-wise (or perhaps you just think you are).
- You are a guest.

Alcoholic writer

- You traveled to this remote island to write – but you are not writing.
- You easily come to despise others.
- You are lecherous, and frequently drunk.
- You are a guest.

Sun worshiper

- You like open sea fishing, sun tans and athletic activities.
- You appear streetwise and confident.
- You are attractive – and you know it.
- You are a guest.

Geologist

- You have come here to investigate the sinking island.
- You are nerdy, and a little confrontational/rude.
- You are small, thin and a hypochondriac.
- You are a guest.

Celebrity

- For some reason or other, you are familiar to readers of gossip magazines.
- You may be at the height of your popularity, or a fading star.
- It's important for you to be at the center of attention.
- You are a guest.

Eternal backpacker

- You have circled the globe, and ended up on this island.
- You are a free thinker, independent and a little shabby.
- You like to point out how square the other characters are
- You are a guest.

Pilot

- You got stuck on the island after your plane got engine trouble.
- The part you need to repair the engine has been ordered, and will arrive on the next boat.
- You are a rugged adventurer.
- You are a guest.

Son or daughter

- You are the son or daughter of one of the other characters.
- You can be a teenager or a child.
- You are stubborn and rude.
- You are either a guest or a native.