

Handle with care.  
(GameChef 2012 version: not final.)  
by jackson tegu

This is a Larp, and a story game.

There is a city which is like most others: in it are individual people who are trying to puzzle out their problems and who decide to stay up all night to wander the city in search of meaning, and there are also giant monsters who sneak un-noticed through the city, peering in at the lives of the humans and watching them consider their problems. And of course there's the municipal light truck, with its big searchlight which drives around attempting to locate these supposed giant monsters.

To enjoy this, we will need between 5 and 8 players. When you are ready, gather them.

### Familiarizing

Well before then, you will have to build the city. Use stacks of empty cardboard boxes. This city is tall – it boasts thirteen buildings, each about as tall as the tallest player. The city has streets, because the buildings are set out in a four by four grid – one building per block, with three open spaces. The open spaces aren't adjacent to one another. The streets are wide enough that the players can navigate them, but not wide enough that the players can do so very quickly. The players certainly shouldn't be able to pass one another on the same street.

As by now you've assumed, the players are giant monsters. But peaceful ones, who are curious and perhaps even helpful. They're the kind of giant monsters to peer into apartment windows, but not the kind to crush things or knock things over.

The city that you build will be navigated in darkness, so some clever signage will be in order. Using black paint, make signs on velum or waxpaper and pin them into cut-out sections of the cardboard buildings. Behind the cut-out sections, place LED electric candles – the light should be enough to read the sign, but shouldn't illuminate much beyond that. Make the cut-out signs appear like shop windows where appropriate, putting them down at street-level. Where appropriate, signs can be placed on different sides of a tower. For the two “workplace” signs, put them part way up different towers. For the four “apartment” signs, put them partway up towers which don't have workplaces in them. They can be above businesses if you like, or be on the same tower as one another. For the three buildingless signs, fashion a tented piece of cardboard 6” high and cap the ends. You'll notice that there are no bars or clubs – those are in another part of town, this part of town has no night life.

Buildingless signs: Downtown Plaza / Memorial Park / All-Day Parking

Signs for buildings: Scott's workplace / Heather's workplace / Scott's apartment / Heather's apartment / Clair's apartment / Daniel's apartment / Parking Garage / Department Store / Grocery / Coffee Shop / Fitness Center / Art Gallery / Bakery / Diner / Hotel / Hats / Vintage Clothing / Records / Antiques / Books / Laundromat / Library / Community College / Pizza / Bikes

Once you've built the city, find four miniatures to use as the four protagonists. The miniatures should be 1-2 inches tall for the scale to be right, and easily differentiated between. These are Scott, Heather, Clair, and Daniel. When your players are all together, you'll hand around the four strips of paper below, each time a strip is placed in front of you, fill in one line and pass it on.

Scott

Torn about having children  
has an office job

Likes: \_\_\_\_\_

Likes: \_\_\_\_\_

Dislikes: \_\_\_\_\_

Heather

Enjoys her work but lacks challenge  
has an office job

Likes: \_\_\_\_\_

Likes: \_\_\_\_\_

Dislikes: \_\_\_\_\_

Clair

Wonders if there's more to life than her current lot

Likes: \_\_\_\_\_

Likes: \_\_\_\_\_

Dislikes: \_\_\_\_\_

Daniel

Wonders if he's growing up too fast

Likes: \_\_\_\_\_

Likes: \_\_\_\_\_

Dislikes: \_\_\_\_\_

After those are filled out, read aloud and made available for individuals to read at their leisure, a deck of cards without jokers is shuffled and delt into hands – one fewer hands than there are players. It's ok if some of the hands have one more card than some of the others.

Pacing with cards and moving the miniatures

When the game is underway, all but one of the players will take up the hands of cards, and play them to gradually tell of the night wanderings of the four protagonists. While doing so, the players move about the city. The cards are played in order, starting at A and finishing at 10: all of the As are played before any of the 2s, but the order of the suits can switch around. The Face cards will be used afterwards for epilogues. When a player plays a card in the suit of spades, they say its number aloud, and then tell the next place that Scott has arrived at, and what he's doing there, and maybe what he's thinking too. So just as Scott's story is paced by spades, so is Heather's by hearts, Clair's by clubs and Daniel's by diamonds. Before playing a card, a player – the next player in order, naturally – goes to the protagonist's

most recent location and fetches the miniature which represents them, moving it to the location that they feel this protagonist is heading next. Even if their story brings a protagonist inside a building, the miniatures should remain on the outside.

You'll find joy in building off of what other players say for each of the protagonists, making their stories richer by re-incorporating earlier details, and listening closely enough so that you can be sure to not accidentally contradict what other players have said about each protagonist's life. Remember to say the card's number and the protagonist's name before you begin your description.

### The municipal light truck

All this would be very easy, were it not for the municipal light truck. The player who is without a hand of cards at the beginning, preferably by volunteer, will drive around, attempting to illuminate the giant monsters. Making a municipal light truck is easy. Open a box of macaroni dinner, pouring the contents out, but not eating them. Cut a hole so that a toilet paper tube can be sunk into one of the broad sides of the macaroni dinner box at a 45 degree angle, pointing towards the short edge which will be the front of the municipal light truck. Pour the noodles back into the box and tape up the open end, then place a bike light or LED flashlight into the tube to create the searchlight effect.

Municipal light trucks are driven carefully, with a good deal of caution. Their drivers are permitted to make U-turns, when necessary, but speeding so that the macaroni noodles shift or make a sound is forbidden. Players who can't drive safely are asked not to play at all. Who is this driver? Think about them as you drive the streets. This is their job. They are a good person.

When a giant monster is illuminated by the beam of the municipal light truck, the players switch places. The monster player gives the new monster their hand of cards and anything else they're carrying (miniatures, and also see below). The new driver of the municipal light truck can't illuminate the new monster immediately, of course.

### Monsters talking & monsters masquerading as buildings.

While a monster is speaking the story of a protagonist, they cannot move, and the municipal light truck can illuminate them while they are talking. This danger of being interrupted keeps the individual sections of story down to a serviceable length.

A monster can render themselves un-illuminatable by the municipal light truck by standing on one of the buildingless spaces (the Downtown Plaza, Memorial Park, or All-Day Parking), putting down everything they're carrying (except for their hand of cards, of course), touching each hand to the opposite elbow above their head to form a block-like top, standing motionless, and closing their eyes. When a monster does this, the municipal light truck will mistake them for a building, and the illumination won't count. But if the monster stirs, or opens its eyes, the municipal light truck can illuminate them and switch places.

## Objects

Throughout the city are many small objects, normal things on the scale of the protagonists. The giant monsters can move these objects around, put them places for the protagonists to discover and reflect on, or use while at a location. You can create these with small tents of paper, an inch tall; or with tiny plastic facsimiles. At the beginning of the game, the objects are placed throughout the streets. They are meant to inspire.

The Objects: Umbrella / Hammer / Pocket Knife / Watch / Feather / Unopened Can of Beer / To-Go Box / Action Figure / Newspaper / Cup of Coffee / Hat / Scarf / Flashlight / Ring of Keys / Ballpoint Pen / Classic Novel / Baby Stroller / Nickel / Glasses / One Shoe

## Dawn & Epilogues

After all of the 10s have been played, the municipal light truck's driver is off shift, and it's morning. Set up a lighting effect which will transform the city into one of early, pre-dawn light. Set this up on the floor on one corner of the city, and gather the players on one of the far sides, whichever is most comfortable. The face cards are now played to tell the protagonists' epilogues, as follows: the Js are played to say what they each do later that week, then the Qs tell what they do later that year, and then the Ks tell what they do later in life. And that's the end of the game.

## Specifics & Clarification

Please, speak up. It's very important that everyone hears you. Also, please speak one at a time.

If a building is knocked over, the game immediately ends.

The monsters can walk around the outside of the building grid, but not far – and they shouldn't be moving too quickly. The municipal light truck can also go around the outside of the building grid.

The monsters aren't carrying the protagonists in the fiction. The monsters don't let themselves be seen by the protagonists.

Feel free to address the protagonists' issues, but don't feel obliged to.

End notes

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Number of dedicated threads on the Forge, which I then abandoned to focus on writing: 1

Number of Game Chef related in-person meetups after that: 2

Ingredient use:

The municipal light truck incorporates *Lantern*.

The resting ability for the giant monsters, ie to masquerade as buildings, draws on *Mimic*.

The giant monsters within a miniature city were sparked from the thread *Daikaiju (long)*

Daniel's issue comes from *Misspent Youth: A game of juvenile delinquency and being awesome*.

Daikaiju thread: <http://indie-rpgs.com/archive/index.php?topic=3082.0>

Misspent Youth thread: <http://indie-rpgs.com/archive/index.php?topic=21112.0>

Theme use:

The game is extremely daunting to set up, and then offers the full range of play experiences within the initial play of it. If I have done what I set out to, each player will cherish their beautiful memory of play which, they fear, additional instances of play would tarnish. "It wouldn't be as good as the first time I played," each will think, wanting to preserve their initial experience.

Thank you for reading. If you play, I'd love to hear about it.

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