Start Anywhere

The hunt for green January
by Jim Clunie
Decoherence 2: added recommended items, online play and influences

The End of Everything

Since the day the world ended, maybe the multiverse hasn't finished with you. Some of you claim to know, but who's to say, really? Whatever the case, as the cold closed in, each of you *reached* out, from some resource you never knew you had, for any way to go on. Your world died, but you coursed elsewhere, scattered around a happy and unsuspecting new variant with different lives and different names. Over the years, you found each other, those who wanted to be found, and another thing: a purpose.

Players take the roles of refugees from a destroyed universe - not destroyed by accident: the Philosophers have come to realise that the consumption of their world and countless others fueled the establishment of a far distant utopia, a place of endless spring and the best of good fortune. What the characters choose to do with this *green January,* if they ever find it, determines the end of the story.

Recommended for play
- Two six-sided dice for each player, pen, paper
- *Optional:* Several newspapers or a broad selection of magazines, a whiteboard

Creating a Philosopher
A character begins the hunt with:
- A Name of the player's choice up to 24 characters, not counting spaces. May not contain the letters E, Y or Z.
- Age of 24 years.
- Physical, Financial and Intellectual Success determined by rolling two six-sided three times, adding each pair of results and arranging the scores as desired. If you roll a double (the same number on both dice), the score is 6 + the result of one of the dice.

The character sheet shows these Traits with space to record updates, as they change frequently in the course of play.
- A Health score equal to the highest starting Success track. This score generally doesn't change.

Keeton

The Philosophers begin with a single clue: *Find Keeton.* He might be one of those responsible for the world's abolition, a source of advice, or even both: a renegade within the enemy's camp.

When, coursing between worlds, any part of a Philosopher's name becomes Keeton, the character might realise his identity as a counterpart of the individual they seek. The player must make an identity test. If *failed,* Keeton leaves the group at the end of the timeline encounter, but before making a new character, the player may declare one of the World Traits of *green January* beginning with the same initial letter as one of the current World Traits.

Hunting

All dice rolls use two six-sided dice.

Coursing

When coursing from one timeline to the next as the Hunt Leader, a player rolls the dice, taking the number on each die separately. If he rolls doubles, he takes two moves with each die roll (that is, the same number four times) and the change is *threatening.* The Hunt Leader must use all his die rolls, but may give the second or subsequent roll to another player to use.

The player must use at least one die roll to declare a new or different World Trait - either what the timeline *is (reality)* or what it *appears to be (perception).* The player chooses a headline from any handy newspaper or magazine. If there are already as many World Traits as the number of players, one of the present World Traits no longer applies to the new

timeline and the new trait must begin with a letter shifted from the initial of the erased World Trait by the value of the die roll, in the range A to X (letter X may be read as eX). Players may not choose World Traits starting with the *sign of strange danger*, Y, or *sign of strange safety*, Z.

A player may apply each additional die roll to:

- Add or change another World Trait (*threatening*)
- Alter the character's Name, changing one letter by a number of alphabetic places equal to the die roll, but not to Y or Z (*unthreatening,* but see above)
- Alter the character's Name by adding a number of letters equal to the die roll, but not E, Y or Z, or by removing a number of letters equal to the die roll (*unthreatening,* but see above)
- Increase the character's Age to a maximum of 120 (*unthreatening*). Extreme age has any expected social consequences.
- Reduce Age to a minimum of 1 (*threatening*). Children and adolescents have more limited physical and social capacities.
- Increase Physical, Financial or Intellectual Success to a maximum of 12 (*threatening*)
- Reduce Physical, Financial or Intellectual Success to a minimum of 3 (*unthreatening*)
- Give the roll to another player to do any of the above. The other player decides how to use the roll, which may in turn *threaten* his character's identity.

Tourism stunt recreates Bondi in London: The referee may declare any existing World Traits, other than those just introduced by the Hunt Leader, to be *reality* or *perception* for this timeline.

For each new timeline, the value of Decoherence increases by 1 and each character's Age increases by 1 year.

If any change counts as *threatening,* the player must make an *identity test.* This test has an initial difficulty equal to Decoherence plus all of the character's Success tracks and succeeds if the observed-state is less than the character's Age. Characters with a higher Age than the test's difficulty succeed automatically. If the player fails, the character no longer accepts his identity as a wanderer of parallel worlds but instead identifies with the current timeline. He can no longer course to different timelines and loses interest in the hunt. The player should generate a new character, a native of the present timeline who shares the Philosophers' mysterious gift of parallel travel, who meets the group in the timeline's encounter (see below).

Tests

When a player attempts an action that the referee decides is difficult, the player must make a dice roll, adding the numbers rolled and doubling the total if a double was rolled. The player subtracts this total from the test's difficulty (typically 12 or less for easy challenges that some characters can overcome without effort, 13 for moderate challenges, to 18 or more for very difficult attempts), succeeding in his attempt if the resulting number (the *observed-state*) is less than his score in Physical, Financial or Intellectual Success.

Results that may injure a character (either failing a test, or a successful attack by another player character) force a *Health test* with an initial difficulty equal to the observed-state of the test that led to this circumstance. A character who fails a Health test takes a significant injury or becomes dangerously ill. He cannot course until healed, either by a successful Health test or an Intellectual Success test by another character, in each case using the observed-state of the previous failed Health test as the initial difficulty. The player may instead decide that the character dies and make a new character who appears in the next timeline.

At Some Campgrounds, 'Roughing It' Means No Espresso

To fashion a brief scene describing how the characters find each other in the new timeline, each player other than the Hunt Leader describes one significant fact

related to a current World Trait and to one of the other characters. The player of that character decides if the fact *occurs* or is *reversed.* The referee may introduce one other fact related to one of the World Traits.

For the next course, the same character can continue as Hunt Leader or the group may decide another player should be the Hunt Leader. (For a less traditional style of game, try exchanging the role of referee in the same way.)

<u>Online Play</u>

Playing *Start Anywhere* through an online medium, such as a forum, chat, or e-mail list, offers new possibilities.

To determine new World Traits, the group might agree to use a specific large news site.

All players might write game posts in a chosen text colour, initially yellow. The Hunt Leader might change the text colour along the sequence red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet by applying a die roll.

If the medium allows, the Hunt Leader might post the current World Traits and Decoherence to a screen location where all players can see them and each player might record the character's present Traits in a signature.

Conceptual influences: The remarkable *Joe in Ten Persons*, *Breaking the Ice*, *TORG*, "Godwar"
Michael Moorcock in general, Roger Zelazny's *Nine Princes in Amber*, *The Ship of the Law*
Jose Luis Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths"
Greg Bear's *City at the End of Time*
William Burroughs, just a little
The Many Worlds Interpretation, particularly its implications for conservation of energy
By reversal: AD&D

Premises and plot intentions: I wanted the end of the game to feel very different from the beginning. Perhaps "Revenge is hollow" is a theme. If the Philosophers ever reach the perfect world at the end of their quest, will they exact justice? Will they dwell there in peace? With all the worlds and lives they've abandoned, are they much different than Keeton and his cohorts?
The identity test plays into this: Why not give up your obsession? What do you owe to the bitter refugee whose memories of another world colour your own?

System: I wanted to refer to classic games, particularly backgammon and *Snakes and Ladders*, to a lesser extent *Monopoly* and the like, as well as studies of probability and game theory. *Jumanji*, too.

Name

Age:

Physical Success:

Financial Success:

Intellectual Success:

Health: ___

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