

PARADIGM: 2018 PANDAEMONIUM

Style Guide - No Spoilers

Welcome,

You are reading a style guide meant to introduce you to our live-action roleplaying event, *Pandaemonium*. The purpose of this guide is to explain the basic premise of the event, as well as the important details that you need to know. It includes information about the themes, aesthetics, setting, and style of play, as well as practical considerations such as costuming.

After reading it, you should know what to expect from your experience with the event.

A style guide is a document to help writers know what they should write; this style guide is adapted from a longer and more detailed guide distributed to the writers. The information here is the same information the writers will use to create your character. While we haven't included all the details (we wanted to keep this document relatively brief), we do want you to know enough about the world to enjoy your experience at the event.

This document is *not* a comprehensive design document. We didn't include details on calibration or safety, nor did we offer a comprehensive schedule of events. We will make these available before the event, and all players will have to participate in a safety and calibration workshop prior to the event. The purpose of this style guide is not to describe every aspect of *Pandaemonium*; it's to set expectations for the event.

We'd like to thank you for reading, and welcome you to *Pandaemonium*. Enjoy this guide: we enjoyed making it for you!

SPOILER SAFE

Pandaemonium has two style guides: one subtitled "No Secrets" and one subtitled "No Spoilers." We acknowledge that our players come from different styles and traditions; some prefer to know exactly what is going on, while others prefer discovering secrets over the course of play. To accommodate both styles of play, we have two style guides.... One with spoilers, and one without.

This style guide has no no spoilers, meaning it's missing two pages of secrets. If you want to switch and review the other style guide, see the *No Secrets Style Guide*.

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The Basics

The Premise

1980s. Atlantic City. It's the biggest Halloween party in New Jersey, drawing colorful characters from up and down the coast. Everyone who comes is wearing a costume—or are they? During the party, everyone gets trapped in an otherworldly version of the Showboat, and must fight to hold on to their humanity and sense of self, or embrace the transformation and become something monstrous.

Important Themes

Loss of reality • Masks and Costumes • Identity versus Monstrosity • Memories • Spookiness and the Uncanny • Reconciliation and Exploration of Identity

Player Experience Goals

Player versus Environment. Rituals. Questioning the self, humanity, and monstrosity. Intrigue. Secrets and betrayal. A backdrop of bars, games, and entertainment.

Inspirations

Edward Gorey • Old Hallow's Eve Poems • Spooky Folk Tales and Urban Legends • Stranger Things • Silent Hill • Edgar Allan Poe

Motifs

Autumn • Eerie light • Mirrors • Masks and dolls • Facelessness • Carnivals, circus, carousels • Eyes • Dusk • Shadows • Ritual space

Expectations

Pandaemonium is a game of personal horror. Players will play party-goers heading to a costume party in the mid-1980s, and enter as part of a larger group. These groups may vary from a cult of serial killers to a group of crime-solving teenagers to a team of professional thieves casing the joint. Shortly after the party begins, the party-goers will realize they've

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they've departed the mundane world, and are trapped someplace supernatural.

Players will explore their relationships within their own groups, and will have to learn about the other strangers trapped in the Showboat with them. Over the course of the event, they'll encounter various phenomenon and discover personal connections with other party-goers. As they do, they'll realize they have the opportunity to transform into something not quite human, or find the means to escape.

In the end, the players will face a choice of whether or not to have their characters leave the Showboat... and accept the consequences thereof.



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Style of Play Character Arcs

Players should be aware of the expected character arcs. This is not a game where players have to discover the “right answer” to accomplish their goals. Instead, players guide themselves along a character arc and interact with other players doing the same. Players may deviate from the expected character arc, but should remain aware of expectations and respectful of players who wish to follow this progressions.

- **Act I:** The character enters the party, unaware of the supernatural. The character discovers they’re trapped in an otherworldly version of the Showboat hotel. The character finishes this act confused, scared, or determined to escape.
- **Act II:** The character searches to find out what happened. They discover they have personal connections to other characters present, and begin to understand a bit more about the space in which they’re trapped and the possible consequences thereof. By the end of the act, the character realizes that not everyone will be able to leave the Showboat.
- **Act III:** The characters make difficult choices, as some accept the consequences of being trapped in this space while other may succeed in escaping.

Players Determine Their Own Reality

Over the course of *Pandaemonium*, players will have extraordinary leeway to determine the supernatural properties of the space. For example, if a player witnesses a ritual involving the casting of dice, they can decide the numbers on the dice are the key to escape. In this case, that would be true *for that*

MANY STUDIOS, ONE STYLE

When we brought six studios together to make *Pandaemonium*, we knew we had focus on our strengths—narrative, character writing, and experience crafting—and not our differences. The “American Freeform” style of larp is a nebulous term, and each studio had a unique take on what it meant. Our style guide helps us make sure we deliver a coherent, unified experience.

What is that experience? It includes:

- A mechanics-light system based on player consent
- An emphasis on personal development
- Player control over the narrative and setting

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Players have a great deal of responsibility in a game like *Pandaemonium*, not just to themselves, but to others. While reading this guide, realize this style of play is inherently cooperative: there's not much game-play focused on figuring out what's going on; instead, we focus more on mood, atmosphere, and emotional experience.

Most importantly, players must remember that it's not actually a challenge to escape. A character can, if the player wants, figure out how to escape at any time. However, to really experience *Pandaemonium*, we recommend players force their characters to make tough decisions and reflect deeply upon themselves in order to survive. These decisions are the focus of the experience.

player. There are two rules to follow:

- **Ambiguity:** What's true for one individual is not necessarily true for another. In the case of the dice casting ritual, just because one player decides those numbers are the key to escape, no other player is obligated to accept that as true.
- **Escape:** Once a character escapes, they can't return. The player gets to decide what happens to their own character, but that character can't re-enter play. Further, the timing is entirely up to the player.

Important note: although a character can't return after they escape, a player can enter and leave play freely.

Escape

There is an "approved" solution as to how to escape the otherworldly Showboat hotel. The important consideration, however, is that escape should be difficult and come at a cost. Generally speaking, if someone escapes, then someone else should be left behind.

Players are encouraged (but by no means required) to search for the approved means of escape, and accept the restrictions placed upon it. This means that most characters in *Pandaemonium* will fail and remain trapped in the supernatural realm, and transform into something inhuman.

Character Death

Characters may die during the game and at the end of the game, though this action is at the sole discretion of the player. Characters may attempt to harm or steal memories or life forces from one another as long as the players enact this in a consent-based format.

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Character death may work well in several instances:

- A means of sacrifice so another can leave Pandaemonium
- When a player cannot stay the entire time, but would like to make an exit that progresses the story for others
- Pre-negotiated murder by another character

Once a character is out of play, the player may choose to volunteer as a helper or NPC. There are no resurrections in Pandaemonium as we wish to underscore the finality of death; however, it is possible to bring a character close to death, to examine death in a nontraditional way, or to do whatever else is required to safely tell the best possible story. In other words, character death should advance the story.

No Lying

Players should avoid lying, in or out of character, about key game facts. This is a collaborative storytelling experience, and lies create a confusing and conflicting experience.

Supernatural Knowledge

Unless otherwise stated on a character's sheet, no character knows with 100% certainty that the supernatural exists. They may believe firmly, think they know, or have had encounters with the supernatural. However, the character should not know what's going on at the start of the game.

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Setting and Context

Location

The location is the Foundation Room of the Showboat Hotel, which is the actual space in which the game will be played.

There will be several atmospheric effects to make the room somewhat creepy, but players should be aware their character cannot leave the Foundation Room; they are trapped.

Time Period

Pandaemonium is set in the 1980s. This choice has both aesthetic and practical considerations. Aesthetically, there are several pop culture references that are appropriate, including movies such as *Ghostbusters* or the rise of MTV music videos. Current events include the Challenger disaster and the AIDS crisis; this is also the era of "Greed is Good" and rampant commercialism. Practically, this time period allows us to impose two important limitations

- No one has cell phones
- Current political events are off-limits for costuming

Time Period

A player's costuming could be an important part of their character, and players will have an opportunity to share their costuming ideas with the writers as part of the survey. Players should be prepared to have their costume suggest something transformative about their character—it is possible that a costume will become a more integral part of a character over the course of the event.

Remember, this is a Halloween party, players have a lot of

SAFETY & CALIBRATION

Notably absent from this style guide are discussions of safety and calibration. There's a good reason for this: remember, *Pandaemonium* takes place at High Level Games Convention and, as part of the larger event, it uses the convention's safety policy. Further, as the six studios are running additional games at the convention, we're also using a common workshop (so that you can attend one workshop and receive all the safety and calibration mechanics you need for any of our games).

Our safety policies, including our Code of Conduct, will offer a comprehensive policy for the entire convention. We want you to be safe the whole weekend, not just while you're playing at the convention.

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freedom to choose their costumes, if any. At any given Halloween party, there are people who buy expensive costumes, and others who stop by the store and buy an inexpensive costume on the way to the party. Some spend hours crafting a costume, while some throw something together at the last minute. And there are always people who decide, for whatever reason, not to costume. All of these are valid decisions.

There are some costumes that are not appropriate. Any costumes that are culturally appropriative, that contain pop-culture references from the 1990s or later, or are purposely offensive will not be allowed. Players should avoid costumes particular to a religion, especially religions from areas directly affected by colonization. Players will not costume as other races (i.e. "blackface"). Further, in addition to these restrictions, players should avoid overtly humorous costumes that would disrupt the atmosphere of the event.

If the staff determines a player's costume is inappropriate, that player will be asked to leave and change clothes before they are allowed to return.

Content Restriction

In addition to having a positive responsibility to respect other people's race, gender, sexuality, and religion at all times, *Pandaemonium* has a zero tolerance policy for discussions of sexual assault. Players must not introduce or discuss this topic at the game.