

# Das Sonnenrad

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## Foreword

Before continuing I want to make one thing absolutely clear: no reasonable person should entertain any argument excusing the abhorrent actions and policies of the Nazis. Das Sonnenrad is not a vehicle for perpetuating, even in fiction, the evil of Adolf Hitler.

Nimbus and das Sonnenrad are games about the sacrifices made on our behalf by people we will never know. Both games are set against the backdrop of World War Two but I am very aware that these types of sacrifice are not restricted to wartime, nor to soldiers. Every day people give everything for the wellbeing of others. I'd like to think I'd do the same but hope I never have to find out.

Writing das Sonnenrad, came from imagining what I would have done if I were a German in 1945. How could you reconcile, hating Hitler and the Nazis for what they had done in the name of your country, with an all consuming desire to protect your loved ones from the Soviets?

It's naive to think all Germans were Nazis. Most German soldiers at this time must have suffered the same fears for the safety of their families as any of their British counterparts during the battle of Britain.

As to the game itself, one of the particular design goals I had when I started out was that at the end of each game the players would have created an "artifact of play". The artifact in this

instance being the game map. The players could take this away with them as a record and, in my dreams, show it to others familiar with the game so that could in turn "read" what happened. You'll have to be the judge of whether that aspect of the design was successful.

Daniel

### About

Nimbus and das Sonnenrad are storytelling games based around action, intrigue, and the supernatural. However, these more accessible ideas are included primarily as a familiar backdrop. Against them, players will confront the core questions of the game: what value do we place on our own lives, and what sacrifices would we make for our family or the greater good?

### What You Need

A game typically requires three to five people, one large piece of paper, a few markers, and about 40 minutes per person to play. The size of the paper will depend on the surface you play on but the bigger the better. To track contributions some recipe cards, scraps of paper or dollarstore playing cards may also be useful. You will need four cards, or scraps per player. Each player should then write FOCUS, DESCRIBE, LINK, and RESOLVE individually on a card or scrap of paper.

### Game Structure

The structure of Nimbus and das Sonnenrad is designed to help players create a story in three acts. Each act is subdivided into scenes, each with clearly defined actions for the players. When combined, these scenes should create a compelling and complete narrative. To help track the progression of the narrative and the contributions of the players appendix A contains a summary reference.

### How to Play

Nominate someone to be the narrator. They will read the Set-up in "Establishment" and keep things moving. They will also have a double vote in the event of a disagreement and their character can also serve as the leader of the group investigating the "event". However, the title of leader may ultimately prove to be of dubious value.

Ideally the narrator will have played before but this is not essential; rules are few, and far between.

Once underway the game proceeds from scene to scene, with players contributing in the order they feel comfortable doing so. At any stall the narrator will go first, take a double turn, or defer to a player with a strong idea.

Players are also encouraged to add details and vignettes over and above those outlined in the text. A couple of good rules of thumb when dealing with these is to allow everyone to have their allocated turn first. Secondly, and most importantly, these asides should not affect the main story arc nor the personal arcs of the other characters, unless by agreement. If you'd like to control this more carefully you can distribute a "WILD" card to each player restricting them to a single additional contribution.

### Lexicon

There are four words which have particular meaning in this game:

DESCRIBE- a phrase or word describing a person, place or thing.

e.g. When describing the location selected during Establishment "*Siberian Tundra*" Clint DESCRIBES it by adding "*a large herd of tame, grazing caribou*".

FOCUS- this can be a thing, person, place or abstract observation. When introduced it may have no obvious

connection to any other Focuses in the story but during the telling it will come to form an integral component of the narrative.

e.g. during Establishment Daniel adds the FOCUS  
"Abandoned Submarine Base"

LINK- this is a connection between people, things, and/or places. LINKs simply begin as undefined connections which will be Resolved during play.

RESOLVE- this is a phrase that defines a link created between two FOCUSES in play. A LINK may be RESOLVED in multiple ways if there is no contradiction.

e.g. The FOCUSes, "*Bright Lights*" and "*Static Discharges*" are connected by a LINK. Rob decides he wants to RESOLVE this LINK and writes "*The bright lights and static discharges are caused by an alien craft hovering, but invisible, just above the ground.*"

WILD- If you wish to control extra contributions you may limit WILD contributions to one of the following:

- Add a Focus
- Describe a thing, person, or place
- Add a LINK and RESOLVE it.

### Cards

The cards referred to in these instructions are entirely optional. If you do choose to use them however, on the face side you will find suggestive words that may help to create interesting associations for the unfolding story.

# ACT I

In this opening act two important components of the story are established:

- the main characters
- the rules of the reality in which the story takes place.

The second of these two components is worthy of further consideration. While anything can happen in Act I each contribution solidifies the reality that will operate for the remainder of the story. The consistent application of these rules within the reality you create is one of the cornerstones of the majority of satisfying fiction. Put another way, no significant event in the second half of Act Two and three should be down to dumb luck: either it is permitted or suggested by some event or action in act one or it doesn't happen.

## CHAPTER 1- THE DISPATCH

*This chapter establishes the reason why the group was assembled and what is at stake.*

### The Set-up

1. Lay out a big piece of paper (this will be the record of your game- keep a camera handy for the end) and give each player something to write with that is capable of being read from the other side of the table.
2. Mark off a corner of the paper away from the front of the players. This space should be about the size of a paperback. This is where the details for Chapter 12- THE FINALE will be written.

3. Mark off another corner of the paper and entitle it "TELEGRAM DISPATCH TO HITLER".
4. Sort the cards into matching piles. These cards simply help the players track their contributions and the narrator track the progression of the game. As such they are totally optional.
5. If you wish to use them, pass a WILD card to each player. This card can be used to add something to the game at any point. The only rule is that it cannot invalidate or diminish any established piece of the fiction.

#### Hitler's Orders

1. The Narrator sets the scene by reading the background below:

Berlin

January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1945

The once invincible German Army collapses inwards on Berlin; Adolf Hitler's dream of a Thousand-Year Reich crushed between the Soviets from the East and the Allies advancing on the Rhine.

In the frozen heart of Berlin a stooped figure struggles to the surface in the rubble-strewn Chancellery Gardens.

Clasping a folded dispatch between his teeth, Adolf Hitler turns up the collar of his greatcoat. "Es ist kalt eh Blondi" he says to the German Shepherd at his side.

Shuffling forward his eyes come to rest on a knot of soldiers and civilians, their features shrouded in a halo of condensing breath and cigarette smoke.

At his approach one of his personal guard raises a Nazi salute and all eyes turn towards him.

Hitler's appearance is disturbing. His frail, tremor-wracked body and the unmistakable odor of decay are the embodiment of the shattered Third Reich.

Fixing you with his mesmeric gaze he begins to speak. With each word the appearance of a broken old man drops away, replaced by a monster sustained by psychopathic rage.

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It's been 24 hours since two well-armed men woke you with orders you were to go to Berlin. Other than saying that those orders originated with the Führer himself, the men offered no further explanation.

A few short months ago a journey to Berlin would have been dotted with constant reminders of prosperity. Now though, clusters of refugees fleeing before the Red Army dominate the landscape. Their bodies bent beneath a sky filled with acrid smoke a reminder that only time now separates your loved ones from the Soviet hammer and its insatiable sickle.

How did Hitler's promises subvert your nation's patriotism? Was his success so intoxicating that it obscured his abhorrent plans? Maybe greed, and pride made the nation prepared to accept prosperity at any price, or was it the thirst for revenge that fueled the Nazi regime?

You stand now before the author of your nation's demise as he offers one final chance at salvation. An opportunity to save those you hold dear and a promise to forever stamp the supremacy of the Third Reich upon the globe.

"Eighteen hours ago" he says "my intelligence officers

obtained information about an event of a supernatural nature. As a result I have reactivated the Reich's paranormal *Sonnenrad* program and assembled this group. You are to investigate this event and return with assets that will restore glory to the Fatherland. Failure is unacceptable!"

Then, after passing off the dispatch used to punctuate his orders the Furher turns on his heel and is gone, threading his way back through the rubble towards the bunker.

### The Dispatch

*The players create the contents of the dispatch cobbled together by Hitler's intelligence service. Some of the parameters of the story are set.*

1. After Hitler's call to action the investigators are provided with a dispatch containing details of the event cobbled together by his intelligence services. Together the players decide on the location of "The Event". It could be Egypt, The Black Forest, or a submarine. The game may move on but it begins here.
2. Write this location in the middle of the paper.
3. Give one DESCRIBE card to each player.
4. The other players then, in no particular order add a mundane, but evocative, detail next to the location which will serve to set the scene and/or create some flavor. They might include details like whistling winds, ancient ruins, unbearable heat, or biting insects, for example. The DESCRIBE cards contain some text on their face which may help when adding these details. Draw a circle around the location and the details but leave a little space for future additions. Return the DESCRIBE card.

5. Pass each player a FOCUS card and a LINK card.
6. It's now time to add some focal points of the story. These focal points reflect the contents of the hastily prepared dispatch. In addition to the disjointed details regarding the event there is also some superficial analysis, and potentially some first-hand accounts.
7. Taking turns, but in no particular, order players can:
  - a. add an FOCUS to the game sheet. This is an important thing, person, place, or idea in the story. This focal point might be something like:
    - a feverish stranger repeating "I've looked into their eyes"
    - bright lights in the sky
    - the smell of death
    - disturbed graves
    - watches running at double speed
  - b. add a LINK between two existing focal points. Consider this LINK but do not resolve it at this point. If a resolution occurs keep this in mind for later.

In this chapter, focal points that are ambiguous and/or mysterious are encouraged. Nebulous and confusing ideas will leave room for the fiction to develop.

Return the LINK and FOCUS cards.

## Chapter II- PREPARATIONS

*The players establish a background for their character by exploring a scene from their recent past.*

### Historical Scene

1. Each player narrates or roleplays, a scene which takes place between receiving their orders and leaving for Berlin. This scene should establish some kind of context for their involvement. This scene may be their character preparing for the investigation, an interaction with a superior, family member, or friend. In the fiction this could be a flashback experienced on their way to Berlin.

Aim to include things in this scene that speak to character's personality, what they are putting on the line, the reason for their involvement, how they feel about the war, or perhaps even the supernatural.

You may wish to flesh out this scene by getting another player to play the part of your character's uncomprehending spouse, interrogator, or concerned friend. If you do this be sure to give them clear direction and a simple motivation.

For example:

*Rob, I'd like you to play my wife. In the scene she doesn't want me to go. Her fear that I will be killed makes her angry, argumentative, and unforgiving. We part on bad terms.*

2. Players then write the name of their character in front of them and a job title or rank. Along with a name also include three particular things about them e.g. Leutnant Frauke Mars
  - Belted trench coat
  - Bandolier
  - Two holstered 9mm berettas

## CHAPTER III- PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

*Connections between the characters are established.*

### Character Connections

1. Distribute a LINK card and a RESOLVE card to each player. As the cards are used return them to their piles.
2. Each player draws a LINK between two characters or adds a DESCRIPTOR to an existing LINK. **NOTE:** the direction this Link is drawn in is significant!

The line originates with the "dominant" character in the relationship which can be signified with an arrow or other indicator. This will help when fleshing out the RESOLUTION of this LINK.

3. When a player RESOLVES the LINK from 2. the two linked players collaborate to flesh out this resolution by roleplaying or narrating a scene or scenes. The RESOLUTION could be anything, such as: "attended university together", "admire each other's research and correspond" or "fought together". It's also possible the player providing the RESOLUTION may add some flavour for the scene however the characters belong to their players and decisions regarding the RESOLUTION of this LINK are ultimately theirs.
4. As LINKs are made or RESOLUTIONs added the cards are returned to their piles.
5. Write the character's name that you share a LINK with next to yours and rewrite the RESOLUTION of the LINK you share.

## SUMMING UP

You've reached the end of ACT I. All the main characters have been introduced, initial elements are in place and the premise of the game is firmly established. At least they should be..

The Narrator takes a moment to look over the game map and summarizes the contents. The players can interject and clarify the intent of their contributions as it's difficult to set a FOCUS with a few words.

If necessary the players then quickly summarize their characters for the group and annotate their descriptions.

Once this is done you ready for Act II.

# ACT II

Act II brings the characters into contact with contents of the Dispatch. Through confronting these details they gain a complete understanding of the nature of "The Event" and discover what they must do.

## CHAPTER IV- THE END

*This chapter of the game foreshadows the end of the story and provides some direction for the characters' personal arcs.*

### Foreshadowing The End

1. Each player draws a table in front of them with two columns and a number of rows matching the number of players. This table will contain a series of words for use at the conclusion of the story. Title this table "The End".
2. Each player adds a word to the right hand column with a positive connotation e.g. wealth, power, fame, adulation, promotion, survival.
3. Each player then adds a word to the left hand column with a negative connotation e.g. death, loss, shame, betrayal, imprisonment, eternal torment. These ends may be already suggested by FOCUSES from the dispatch.
4. All players transfer the other players words to their table at which point it should be full.

The Narrator should encourage the players to think about the things in this table, as they will choose one from each column for their character's resolution. Often these words will be similar from game to game and that's fine.

## CHAPTER V- DEPLOYMENT

*This chapter establishes the nature of the journey as well as any specific equipment or support troops accessible to the players.*

### Vessel

1. Pass one DESCRIBE card to each player.
2. Together negotiate the type of vessel you're travelling on or in. Find a space to write about this vessel and place a ring around it with a little extra space in which each player add detail. Return the DESCRIBE card.
3. Each player describes or roleplays a scene from some point just before leaving to just arriving at the Location. It's important that this scene contains specific reference to any particular gear they load which might be integral later on.
4. Pass out another DESCRIBE card each. As soon as you arrive at the location each player can DESCRIBE an additional detail they notice about the the location. This might be something like *a gentle snow is falling*, or *fields of wildflowers*. Players may also wish to specify specific structures such as a crumbling bunker, an abandoned chateau, or even a big oak tree. This spot may even serve as an extraction/rendezvous point or as somewhere to store the equipment they deployed with.

## CHAPTER VI- THE HEARTBEAT

Just as you finalize plans prior to investigating the FOCUSES from your dispatch one of the characters encounters someone or something with a piece of information about The Event. An example might be a local busybody, a delirious child, or perhaps the final survivor of the nazi/allied investigative team who arrived right before you.

The only requirement of this "person" is that they are in some way connected to The Event or that they provide significant information about one of the FOCUSES in play. This information may be knowingly deceptive on the part of The Heartbeat and therefore the deception itself is what's significant.

1. Pass a DESCRIBE card to each player.
2. Together decide who this Heartbeat might be. Write a bullet-point description of "the heartbeat" using a detail collected from each player. Ring this.

## CHAPTER VII- GHOSTS OF THE PAST

**NOTE:** Unlike in other chapters of the game, the RESOLVES played during this chapter, can be adjusted by the target player.

A very brief example: Angie draws a LINK between Clint's character and a FOCUS called "bright lights". She then says "You believe your sister was abducted by aliens and you've sought them ever since". Clint likes the sound of this piece of backstory but modifies it to "how about, it was me that was abducted and I'm terrified they will return for me"?

This chapter may provide some clear direction for a personal connection to the FOCUS each character investigates during Chapter VIII

### Focus Connections

1. Distribute a LINK card and a RESOLVE card to each player. As the cards are used return them to their piles.
  
2. Each player then adds one of the following per turn:
  - a. a LINK between one of the other characters and a FOCUS
  
  - b. a RESOLUTION to one of these LINKs.

These RESOLUTIONS may, but do not need to be, related in character and as part of a flashback scene. This flashback scene may relate to the reason for their selection by Hitler.

Once again you will need to give clear direction to the participants in the scene.

## CHAPTER VIII- GROUND ZERO

*FOCUSES are investigated*

### Investigate

1. Distribute a FOCUS, a RESOLVE, and a LINK card to each player.

During this scene, which may involve any number of other characters (but does not count as their turn) the player contributes one item per turn in the following configurations:

- add a LINK between two established FOCUSES one of which being the FOCUS they are investigating
  - add a new FOCUS which is LINKed to the FOCUS their character has chosen to investigate (this LINK is implied and does not use a player's LINK card.
  - add a RESOLUTION to a LINK.
2. Each player selects a FOCUS introduced in Chapter I- The Dispatch that their character is going to investigate and then narrates or roleplays, a scene that encapsulates their investigation. The selection of this FOCUS may be influenced by the FOCUS to which they have a personal connection as identified in Chapter VII

## Chapter IX- THE TWIST

*Details of the mysteries surrounding The Event get resolved bringing the finale into focus.*

1. Pass a RESOLUTION card to each player.
2. Looking at the game board find the FOCUS or item with the largest number of LINKs attached to it. If there is more than one FOCUS with the same number of LINKs each player can select the FOCUS they wish.
3. Each player now independently comes up with a "twist" on the FOCUS identified above. This twist is an alternate reimagining of the FOCUS. For example:

Multiple scenes have centred around the FOCUS "rift in the space-time continuum" and it clearly has the most LINKs. The thrust of the fiction developed so far in connection with this FOCUS is that an army has been summoned to the other side of the rift for some nefarious purpose.

One of the players suggests that rather than being an army to command they are in fact waiting for the right moment to invade Earth and they are more than powerful enough to do so successfully. The other players like the sound of this and this twist is added to the FOCUS. This revelation changes the direction of the fiction from "how can we use this army to defeat the Germans" to "we need to close this rift or we all die" giving a clear path to the Finale.

4. Roleplay or narrate a scene which encapsulates this twist.
5. Add a short summary of this twist to the FOCUS or FOCUSes.

## CHAPTER X THE NARROWING

*This chapter examines the ideas currently in play and assesses their significance and/or relevance to the finale:*

1. Together all the FOCUSES in play are revisited and reevaluated in light of The Twist. Some FOCUSes may be discarded at this point.
2. Each player addresses the LINK between their character and the FOCUS that was set-up during CHAPTER VII- GHOSTS OF THE PAST. They may resolve it, set it up to be resolved in a meaningful way during the finale or leave it unresolved until the Epilogue.

This is the end of Act II and as at the end of Act I the narrator summarizes the state of play in preparation for the finale.

# ACT III

Act III ties up the loose ends, resolves the mystery, and establishes the implications of The Event on the future.

## XI THE FINALE

*Resolution. All the ideas come together and are resolved for better or for worse.*

1. Distribute one DESCRIBE card to each player.
2. In the space on the page carved out during I ESTABLISHMENT, each player adds a detail or phrase that sets the scene for the finale.
3. Lastly the players either decide, or flip a coin, to see if the Allies arrive (if they haven't already) and are involved in the finale.
4. On the table created during CHAPTER IV players draw a line connecting one item from the positive column to one item from their negative column that fits with the ending they have in mind. This can be internalized for dramatic effect and filled in afterwards for posterity.
5. Each player narrates, or roleplays their character's actions during the final scene. You can chop back and forth and add things to other narratives as required as long as it doesn't change someone else's outcome. This is a great chapter to collaboratively storytell, synergizing ideas and bringing together your combined storytelling skills to create a memorable ending.

## XII TELEGRAM DISPATCH TO HITLER

*The players document the game in what amounts to a summary of events in dispatch form.*

1. Together the players compose a dispatch for Adolf Hitler detailing the events that transpired during the investigation.

As it is being sent in morse code each player will dictate a terse, unemotive, line to add to the dispatch ending, of course, with "stop". The narrator uses the spot on the paper carved out during the set-up to record this telegram.

As the dispatch is being composed and sent simultaneously there are no take-backs once a line is out it's out. Each player then adds a second line etc. until finished. The Narrator is responsible for recording this dispatch.

## EPILOGUE

*The lasting effects of the investigation are played out tying up any loose end.*

- What happened next for your characters and the war? If they're dead, what affect did their actions have on history.

END