

Public Access

What is this?

Public Access is a storytelling game for 3-5 participants. The game is divided into two major sequences. In the first sequence, players portray a group of adults who have come together online to discuss their memories of a short-lived public access TV show they watched as children. One character will remind the others about a mystery surrounding the show. They then relate their memories of specific episodes of the show, in the hope that clues to solving the mystery are contained within.

In the second sequence, the players tell the story of an individual who finds the aforementioned online discussion and engages in a field investigation to establish facts surrounding the mystery. At the end of the second sequence, players discuss their theories about the mystery.

Inspirations for this game include creepypasta stories like "Candle Cove" and "1999," and emergent mystery games like *Society of Dreamers* and *Psi Run*.

Before Play Begins

As a group, players will answer the following questions about the public access TV show their game will focus on:

1. What strange production feature did the show have that made it stand out from other shows you watched as a kid? Perhaps it was wildly varying episode lengths, unpredictable air times, the same weird song playing on a loop in the background, or the characters always being slightly out of frame.
2. The show was theoretically aimed at children, and yet made near-constant reference to a single, adult theme. Name it. Perhaps it was the main actor's pending, real-life divorce; the virtues of the gold standard; a recitation of the minutes of the last city council meeting; or reviews of restaurants in other cities.
3. What drew you to the show as a child? Perhaps it was hosted by a man in a silly/kid-friendly costume; the characters on the show were puppets; the audio was dubbed-in over old cartoons; or the show featured photo montages of cute animals.
4. If there are any characters implied from the above question, name them.
5. What was the show called?
6. Why is it physically impossible to re-watch the show? Perhaps the original recordings were destroyed in a station fire; the VHS tapes it was recorded to have deteriorated over time; or the show was streamed live and no recordings were ever made.
7. How many episodes aired? The answer should be no fewer than nine, and no more than twelve. For a shorter game, go with nine.
8. Name the small town where the show was produced. Identify three significant details about the town. Some ideas for significant details include: historical landmarks or geographical features; cultural events, such as festi-

vals and parades; or symbols of the town's major industries, such as factories and farms.

Part One - Online Introductions

In Part One, we are introduced to a group of characters who have met in an online forum to discuss the TV show. Each player will portray one of these characters.

Players should, in turn, introduce themselves in-character, and talk about a single childhood memory related to the show. Perhaps the show's short run was during a particularly hard time in their young life, or maybe there was something specific about the show that resonated with them. Since the characters are meeting on an internet forum, the players should strictly use screen names with one another.

This is free narration. Anything a player says is acceptable, so long as it is true for their character. The information gained from the introductions can help further develop the lore surrounding the show, or they can simply be personal reflections of the characters themselves. So long as it relates back to the show in some way, you're in good shape.

Part Two - The Mystery

After introductions are complete, one character should introduce a mystery surrounding the show. The mystery can be anything that makes sense in the game's context to that point, but the creepier the better! Here are some examples: a person connected to the production of the show went missing; a series of unsolved child murders took

place during the show's run; an unidentified person appeared on the show once, frightened and crying; the show's final episode contained nothing but thirty minutes of sustained, unsettling noise, like screaming or animal sounds.

IMPORTANT: The mystery shouldn't be solvable based-off a simple viewing of the show.

Part Three - The Episodes

At this point, the characters will attempt to gather clues based solely on their memory of each episode. The first player, in-character, will describe Episode 1. This is free narration. He should start at the beginning and proceed through a description of what his character remembers taking place in that episode. He should go out of his way to add-in details about things that appeared on screen, or that could be heard in the audio. A few minutes of narration should be sufficient.

Remember: the creepier the better! Perhaps someone just out-of-frame was whispering strange things throughout the episode, or it had a special guest who wore a pig mask and made little baby noises.

Once the first player has finished narrating their memory of Episode 1, each other player, in turn, gets a chance to offer a single revision based on their own memory by saying "If I recall correctly..." and then offering a change of no more than one sentence. The original narrator can accept the amendment by saying "Yes, I think that's right," or reject the amendment by saying "No, I don't remember it that way." In either case, the original narrator can add any clarifying details they wish.

If a player has no amendment to offer for Episode 1, they can pass by telling the first player "That's how I remember it."

Once the first player has finished accepting and rejecting amendments, the other players will have a discussion about whether the narration included a clue related to the mystery, and, if so, what it was. If a consensus is reached, the first player should write the clue on an index card, with a note that it came from Episode 1. If there is no consensus, play simply proceeds to the next player.

IMPORTANT: the clues written on the index cards should not be able to directly solve the mystery on their own. They should be things that give the players leads to follow in Part Five.

The next player repeats the process with Episode 2, and so on, until all episodes have been recalled.

Part Four - The Local

In Part Four, the story shifts to be about a modern-day resident of the town where the TV show was produced. This character, called the Local, has discovered the online forum where the show was being discussed, and has decided to conduct an investigation into the mystery.

As a group, players should answer the following questions about the Local:

1. What is their age, race/ethnicity, gender and profession? Perhaps they are a 45-year-old black male librarian, a 16-year-old female student of Pakistani origin, or a 28-year-old white male steelworker.
2. How long have they lived in the town? Perhaps they have recently moved to town, have lived there a few years, or have lived there their entire lives.

3. Why were they unable to watch the TV show when it originally aired? Perhaps they were too young (or not even born), they were too old to watch kids shows when it aired, or they didn't live in a town that carried the show.
4. Why are they personally invested in solving the mystery surrounding the TV show? Perhaps they have a familial connection to the events surrounding the show, they are writing a book about local urban legends, or they simply love a good mystery.

Part Five - Field Investigation

The group should have around 6-10 clues from Part Three. For the first scene of the field investigation, choose a player to be the Local. The player to their right will be the Guide. The Guide chooses one or two clues and uses them to frame a scene which sees the Local engaging in an investigation related to the clues. The Guide will identify any NPCs who may be present in the scene, and assign roles to himself or any other player at the table who does not control the Local.

The scene should be played to a natural conclusion. Once it ends, the player of the Local will determine if any facts about the mystery were learned. If so, he will write those facts on the Fact Sheet. No more than three facts should be written down per scene.

For the second field investigation scene, control of the Local switches to the player to the left of whoever played them in the first scene, and that player will now be the new Guide. The Guide uses one or two clues from the table (including any clues that

were used in the first scene) to frame a scene, which is played out as above. Play continues like this until all clues have been used to frame at least one scene.

IMPORTANT: players should avoid outright solving the mystery during a scene. The facts gathered can heavily imply a certain outcome, but avoid having a character say, for example, "I know who killed all those kids. It was me!"

Conclusion

Once the Part Five has concluded, the group uses the Fact Sheet to have an open discussion about the mystery. Players should feel free to offer their theories, as well as different interpretations of other players' theories. Players may incorporate any context gained during the course of the game to support their theory, but only things written on the Fact Sheet are verifiably true.

The game ends when everyone has had a chance to present their theory, or when the group coalesces around a single theory.