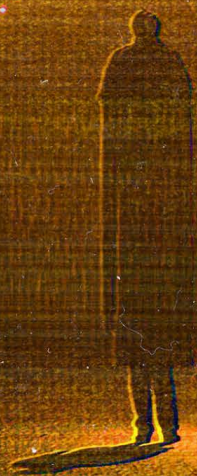


PLAY II

PUBLIC ACCESS



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INTRODUCTION

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OVERVIEW

Public Access is a tabletop roleplaying game about a group of people in 2004—the Deep Lake Latchkeys—who find themselves investigating strange mysteries in and around the town of Deep Lake, New Mexico. In the '80s and early '90s, Deep Lake was the home of a notorious public access television station called TV Odyssey, the history and fate of which—the station literally disappeared—is the source of much speculation in certain corners of the internet. As the Latchkeys conduct their investigations in Deep Lake, they will become increasingly aware of the central role TV Odyssey plays in everything that's going on, and will have to face whatever terrible truth lies at the heart of the infamous station.



THE SETTING

The game takes place in and around the fictional town of Deep Lake, Degoya County, New Mexico. Deep Lake and surrounding Degoya County are in a remote part of the state. The town has fewer than 5,000 residents, but the eponymous lake attracts vacationers and seasonal hands in the summer, doubling the number of people around.

THE DEEP LAKE LATCHKEYS

The player characters are a group of people who met on an internet forum and bonded over their shared history: they each spent part of their childhood in 1980s and early 1990s Deep Lake, they were each latchkey kids, and they were—and are—fascinated by TV Odyssey. They didn't know each other when they lived in Deep Lake, but they've found each other now, and under their new nickname, the Deep Lake Latchkeys, they intend to find out the true story of TV Odyssey.

The Latchkeys are united by something else, though they aren't yet aware of it: they each suffered a terrible trauma in their childhood. Sharing and exploring those traumas is something they will do together as they get more involved in the mysteries surrounding the town.

Just before the game starts, the Latchkeys decide to meet in person: they have rented a house on Rodenbecker Street in Deep Lake, and are going to spend the summer there, getting to the bottom of what happened to TV Odyssey. They haven't had much luck figuring out what happened to TV Odyssey by the time the game starts, but they'll stumble onto some other mysteries in the town that will keep them occupied until then.

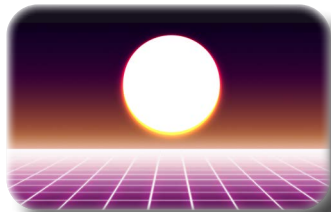
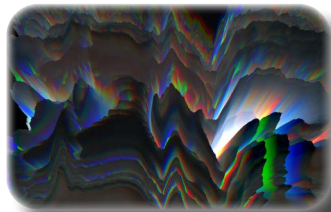


TV ODYSSEY

TV Odyssey was a public access TV studio that broadcast on cable channel 94, reaching Deep Lake and other towns in Degoya County. Anyone living in the county could reserve studio time to create TV programs, and then have those programs put on Channel 94. There was very little oversight, and the station aired a number of strange, low-budget productions, including *Happy Jack the Lumberjack & Friends*, *Voyages to the Astral with Lunaria Gomez*, *Poetry SLAM*, *Gastronomica*, and *Daily Affirmations with David Tilbert*.

The station physically disappeared in 1992—the building simply wasn't there one day—and after a short investigation, the official story was that it burned to the ground, even though there was no physical evidence to support that explanation. To this day, no one in Deep Lake will willingly talk about TV Odyssey or any of its programming: locals will avoid the topic as if the station never existed, and no one admits to knowing any of the people involved in the programming; if pressed or faced with undeniable evidence of TV Odyssey's existence, they will give the official line that it burned down in the early '90s.

The only physical evidence that remains of TV Odyssey are the so-called "Odyssey tapes," VHS recordings of some of the shows that aired on Channel 94. The Odyssey tapes are recognizable by their distinctive purple clamshells, the paper inserts of which depict day-glo pyramids and torii gates. These tapes are extremely rare—and of great value to collectors of the odd—but the Latchkeys have managed to get their hands on one by the time the game starts.



⚠️ CONTENT WARNING ⚠️

On the surface, this game is about a group of young people engaged in a fairly light-hearted and nostalgic investigation of mysteries in the town they used to live in as kids, and it is definitely that! But: the game becomes very dark as you progress through it. Cosmic horror, graphic violence, ritual sacrifice, and other unsavory things come up quite frequently. Additionally, this game occasionally touches on sensitive subject matter, such as sexism, sexual desire, childhood trauma, consumer culture, and other topics. You may decide that this is not for you, and that's ok! There are other excellent mystery-horror games out there for you to read and play. We recommend *Cthulhu Dark*, *Lovecraftesque*, and *The Society of Dreamers*.







GAMEPLAY BASICS



THE CONVERSATION & MOVES

Gameplay in *Public Access* is mostly a conversation. One participant, the Keeper, says how the world behaves; they frame scenes and present challenges to the other participants, the players, who are responsible for saying how their character, a Deep Lake Latchkey, reacts. This is all largely done via a back-and-forth conversation between the Keeper and the players; the narrative authority—who gets to say what—changes from time to time, but it's always within the confines of the conversation.

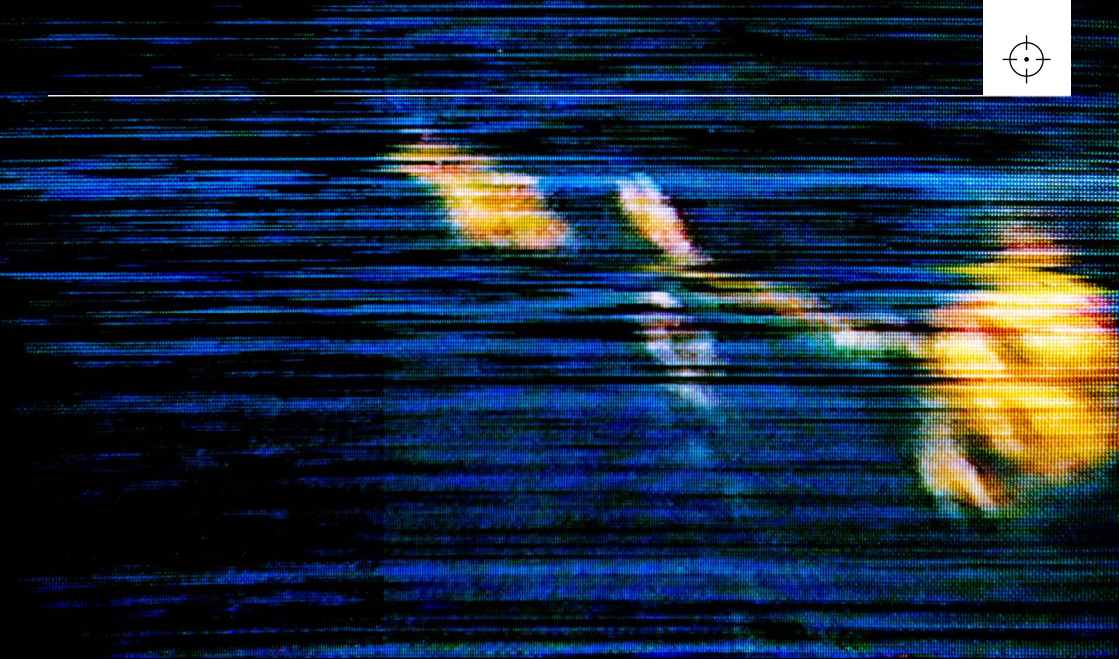
The conversation ends when a player describes their Latchkey doing something that triggers a move. At that point, you read the text of the triggered move, do what it says (usually rolling dice and interpreting the results), and then narrate that part of the story, as needed. Once the move is resolved, you return to the conversation. It won't always be as clean as that when you sit down to play—the Keeper may prefer to shift the spotlight to another character in the middle of resolving a move, returning later when it's dramatically interesting—but that is generally how the game should go.

ABILITIES

Abilities are the Latchkey attributes that are applied to most die rolls in the game. They each have a modifier from -3 to 3. The abilities are: Vitality, Composure, Reason, Presence, and Sensitivity.

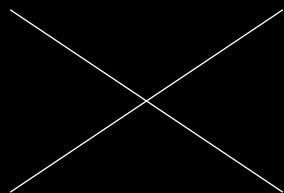
- ✕ Use **VITALITY** if the Latchkey's action involves strength, dexterity, endurance, athleticism, or raw physicality.
- ✕ Use **COMPOSURE** if the Latchkey's action requires a steady hand, a calm disposition, or intense concentration; or if they are trying to avoid a fear-based reaction.
- ✕ Use **REASON** if the Latchkey is studying books, researching a problem, examining a scene, or otherwise engaging their mental faculty.
- ✕ Use **PRESENCE** if the Latchkey is trying to charm someone, intimidate someone, or capture someone's imagination.
- ✕ Use **SENSITIVITY** if the Latchkey's action involves occult or supernatural forces; the Keeper may decide that an action that is seemingly governed by a different ability is actually governed by Sensitivity because of the supernatural, spiritual, or occult nature of what is being undertaken.





ROLLING DICE

In most cases, when you roll dice because a move instructs you to do so, you roll two six-sided dice, sum them, and then add the modifier from the relevant ability. You then check the result against the text of the move. If a move refers to a "hit," it means a result of 7+. If a move refers to a "miss," it means a result of 6-. Moves also frequently have success tiers: a miss, 7-9, 10-11, and 12+.



ADVANTAGE & DISADVANTAGE

When you have an advantage, you roll three dice, keep the two highest, sum them, and then add the modifier of the relevant ability. You will most often have an advantage because of the following:

- > A move gives you an advantage.
- > The Latchkey is using an unmarked item from their Corner of the House in their action (see p.19).

When you're at a disadvantage, you roll three dice, keep the two lowest, sum them, and then add the modifier of the relevant ability. You will most often be at a disadvantage because of the following:

- > A Condition negatively impacts your Latchkey's action (see p.18).
- > The Keeper believes it's appropriate under the current circumstances.

If circumstances would cause you to both have an advantage and be at a disadvantage during an action, they cancel each other out and you roll as normal. Note, however, that advantage and disadvantage do not "stack," nor can one outweigh the other. For example, if you have two Conditions, each of which would plausibly put you at a disadvantage, and one move that gives you an advantage, you would simply roll as normal, without advantage or disadvantage.



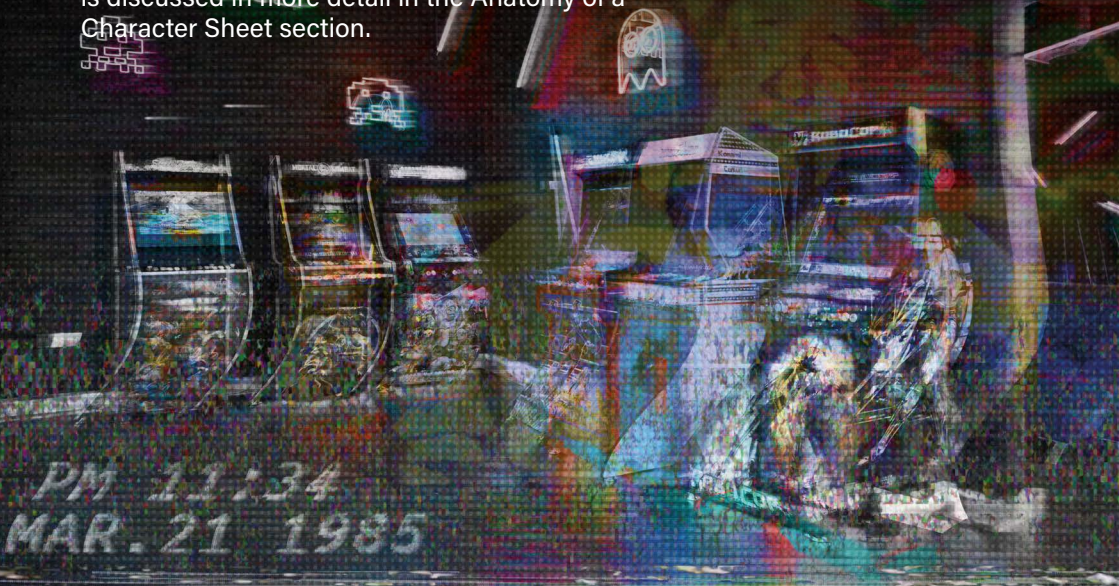
THE KEYS

The Keeper will be very hard on Latchkeys when describing adversity because players have a powerful tool that allows them to resist: turning a Key. After a die roll, and after an outcome has been narrated, the player can choose to turn a Key and increase their die result by one success tier (so, a miss becomes a 7-9, a 7-9 becomes a 10-11, and a 10-11 becomes a 12+). In that case, we narrate a different result, and what was previously narrated does not occur (we say it was a different timeline that we got to collectively experience but that did not actually happen). ○

You may be asking yourself: "Why does the Keeper fully narrate a result that they know the player is just going to discard by turning a Key?" Answer: because it's fun! The Key lets us glimpse different timelines, play them out, feel them, experience the anguish and terror, and then... do something different. It's sort of like one of those old Choose Your Own Adventure books: part of the fun is making the wrong choice so you can see the disaster that befalls your character (and turning a Key is like putting your thumb on the page of those old books so you can go back and choose something else if you chose poorly). Turning a Key is discussed in more detail in the Anatomy of a Character Sheet section.

Example:

Oli's character, Ryan, is attempting to escape the clutches of a corrupt sheriff he has just revealed to be involved in the disappearance of a local family. Oli triggers a move, rolls his dice, and gets a miss. The Keeper describes how the sheriff catches Ryan and throws him off a cliff—to his death—to prevent him from bringing his evidence to the state police. Oli decides he doesn't like this outcome and turns a Key, making his die result a 7-9. This time, Ryan escapes but drops a piece of information the sheriff can use to track him down later.



MOVES

There are three types of moves in *Public Access*: basic moves, Latchkey moves, and custom moves. This chapter focuses on the five basic moves: the Day Move, the Night Move, the Meddling Move, the Nostalgic Move, and Answer a Question.

THE DAY MOVE

When you do something risky or face something you fear, name what you're afraid will happen if you fail or lose your nerve, then roll with an appropriate ability.

- ✕ **On a 10+**, you do what you intended or you hold steady; describe what it looks like.
- ✕ **On a 7-9**, the Keeper will tell you how your actions would leave you vulnerable, and you can choose to back down or go through with it. If you go through with it, the Keeper describes what it looks like.
- ✕ **On a 12+**, you do what you intended or you hold steady, and the Keeper will tell you some extra benefit or advantage you receive. Describe what it looks like.

The Day Move is used when Latchkeys take risky actions during the day, or when they encounter something scary or unnerving during the day. The Keeper has final say on which ability is used for the roll.

THE NIGHT MOVE

When you do something risky or face something you fear, name what you're afraid will happen if you fail or lose your nerve. The Keeper will tell you how it is worse than you fear. You can choose to back down or go through with it. If you go through with it, roll with an appropriate ability.

- ✕ **On a 10+**, you do what you intended or you hold steady; describe what it looks like.
- ✕ **On a 7-9**, you do what you intended or you hold steady, but there is a complication or cost; the Keeper describes what it looks like.
- ✕ **On a 12+**, you do what you intended or you hold steady, and the Keeper will tell you some extra benefit or advantage you receive. Describe what it looks like.

*The Night Move is used when Latchkeys take risky actions at night, or when they encounter something scary or unnerving at night. In *Public Access*, nighttime is more dangerous than daytime, and so the Night Move is written to have more perilous outcomes for the Latchkeys than the Day Move. The Keeper has final say on which ability is used for the roll.*



THE MEDDLING MOVE

When you search for a clue, conduct research, or otherwise gather information, describe how you're doing so and roll with an appropriate ability.

- × **On a hit**, you find a Clue. The Keeper will tell you what it is.
- × **On a 7-9**, there's a complication—either with the Clue itself, or a complication you encounter while searching. The Keeper will tell you what the complication is.
- × **On a 12+**, you also find an Odyssey Tape OR you learn some unusual history about Degoya County (Keeper's choice).

The Meddling Move is the main way a Latchkey turns up Clues and is the most frequently triggered move in the game. The Meddling Move is written to cover all types of information-gathering actions, and the ability used for the roll should match whatever action is taken. For example, if a Latchkey is gathering information by sweet-talking a local law enforcement official, her player would roll with Presence. If they are gathering information by silently listening to a conversation they aren't supposed to hear, her player would roll with Composure. If they are digging through books at the local library, they'd roll with Reason. And so forth. The Keeper has final say on which ability is used for the roll.

THE NOSTALGIC MOVE

When you have an intimate moment with another Latchkey while one of you is waxing nostalgic about something that Takes You Back, you may each clear an appropriate Condition. If you're not the Latchkey waxing nostalgic, you also stumble on a Clue relevant to an active mystery. Tell the Keeper what it is. The Clue cannot conclusively solve the mystery by itself.

This move serves the practical purpose of clearing Conditions, but is principally designed to show the close relationship between individual Deep Lake Latchkeys, and to give a glimpse into their lives. It's also a risk-free way to find a Clue.





THEY'RE GETTING THEIR

VIDEO BEAT

CONFARD

ANSWER A QUESTION

When the Latchkeys have an open, freewheeling discussion about the answer to a Question once they have gathered a number of Clues equal to at least half the Question's Complexity—and reach a consensus—roll plus the number of Clues incorporated into the answer or otherwise explained away, minus the question's Complexity.

- ✕ **On a 10+**, the answer is correct and an Opportunity can be pursued.
- ✕ **On a 7-9**, as above, but the Keeper will add an unwelcome complication to the answer and/or pursuing the Opportunity will be more dangerous.
- ✕ **On a miss**, the answer is incorrect and the Keeper reacts.
- ✕ **On a 12+**, the Big Man will appear while the Latchkeys are pursuing the Opportunity.

The Keeper will regularly introduce mysteries about the town of Deep Lake, and it's the job of the Latchkeys to not only solve those mysteries, but to contend with whatever problems or dangers are associated with it. The way they do so is by first gathering Clues, then using those Clues to answer a Question about the mystery, which then unlocks Opportunities to resolve the situation. As an example, here are the Questions & Opportunities for the mystery called The House on Escondido Street:

Question: What happened to the Rappaports? (Complexity: 6)

Opportunity: Resolve the mystery by revealing the truth to Casey Wilcox. Then, if you wish, destroy the house at 18 Escondido Street OR perform a ritual to banish the evil that resides there.

Importantly, there are no canonical answers to these Questions—players are expected to use their Clues to formulate an answer of their own—to theorize, if you will—and then roll dice to see if they are correct.

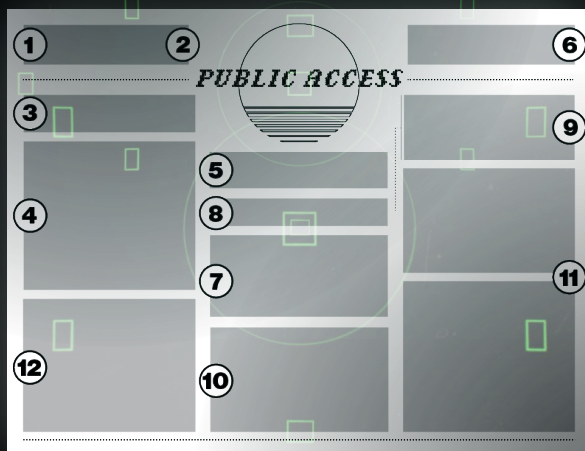
One last note about Answer a Question: the roll can never be taken with advantage or disadvantage. The success tier can be increased by turning a Key, but only if every Latchkey does so.





ANATOMY OF A CHARACTER SHEET

This section briefly details each part of the character sheet and is addressed to players.



① First Name

You should circle any first name you wish, or come up with one on your own.

② Surname

You should circle any surname you wish, or come up with one on your own.

③ Style

A Latchkey's personal style should reflect their basic outlook on life. Latchkeys don't always have to be dressed in a manner that matches their style.

④ Takes You Back

You should pick three items from the list, or come up with your own. The things that Take You Back are activities, games, songs, and other things from your Latchkey's childhood that they enjoy waxing nostalgic about. The three choices are not meant to be ironclad topics—your Latchkey can wax nostalgic about associated things, as well. For example, if *The Oregon Trail* Takes Your Latchkey Back, they might also wax nostalgic about other old school computer lab games, such as *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego*?

⑤ Abilities

These are the character attributes that are applied to most die rolls.

- Use Vitality if your Latchkey's action involves strength, dexterity, endurance, athleticism, or raw physicality.
- Use Composure if your Latchkey's action requires a steady hand, a calm disposition, or intense concentration; or if they are trying to avoid a fear based reaction.
- Use Reason if your Latchkey is studying books, researching a problem, examining a scene, or otherwise engaging their mental faculty.
- Use Presence if your Latchkey is trying to charm someone, intimidate someone, or capture someone's imagination.
- Use Sensitivity if your Latchkey's action involves supernatural forces; the Keeper may decide that any action that is seemingly governed by a different ability is actually governed by Sensitivity because of the supernatural, spiritual, or occult nature of what is being undertaken.



⑥ Conditions

Conditions are traits that cause you to make die rolls at a disadvantage if they would plausibly hinder your Latchkey during an action. You can have up to three Conditions. If you would ever take a fourth Condition, you instead turn one of your Keys (see Turning a Key). Conditions are removed as the result of moves or when the Keeper instructs you to do so.

⑦ Dawn Questions

These questions represent roleplaying goals for the game session. For each marked question the player answers “yes” to during the Dawn phase (see Play Structure, Dawn Phase), they mark a box on the XP Track. The first question is always marked, the second question is always marked after it is unlocked, and two other questions of the player’s choice are marked, for three or four total questions marked at any time. After the questions have been answered in the Dawn phase, players can unmark the two elective questions and mark two different ones, leave one marked and change the other, or leave both marked.

⑧ XP Track

When you mark all six boxes on the XP track, erase them whenever you wish and mark an advancement (see Advancements). There are two ways to mark the XP track: 1) by answering “yes” to a Dawn question and 2) when the text of a move instructs you to.

⑨ Advancements

When you mark an advancement, immediately apply its effects to your character sheet. When all advancements have been marked, your Latchkey can no longer collect XP or advance, but they are in play until forced to retire by the Key of Desolation or until you decide to retire them (see Turning a Key).

⑩ Latchkey Moves

Unlike the basic moves on the Reference Sheet, a Latchkey move can only be used if you have it written on your character sheet. The Latchkey move is one of the ways you personalize your Deep Lake Latchkey.

⑪ Turning a Key (The Key of the Child and The Key of Desolation)

The next section of the character sheet is divided into two parts: The Key of the Child and The Key of Desolation. You will occasionally “turn a Key,” in which case you mark a box from one of these two sections (or, more rarely, from a special section on the Keeper’s mystery sheet). You must then do as the marked text instructs before the current session ends.

The Key of the Child is about exploring the Latchkey’s childhood. The text involves flashbacks to key moments in their young lives, including a traumatic moment that informs who they are in the present day.

The Key of Desolation represents the effects of TV Odyssey on your Latchkey. The text is always marked in order, and the last box heralds your Latchkey’s retirement from the game.



12 Your Corner of the House

This section of the character sheet is where you note interesting and distinctive items that can be found in your Latchkey's corner of the house on Rodenbecker Street. This section also functions as an equipment list, since anything from Your Corner of the House that might reasonably be on a Latchkey's person in a scene, is. Items from Your Corner of the House can be marked to get an advantage on a die roll associated with their use. Generally-speaking, they cannot be unmarked, but marked items remain in Your Corner of the House for use in future scenes, in which case they add to the fictional positioning of your Latchkey's actions but do not convey a bonus to a die roll.

At the beginning of Session One, you and the other players will have an opportunity to add items to Your Corner of the House. After that, items can be added as the result of moves or when the Keeper instructs you to do so.

Easy Bake Oven, The Day After, "Who Killed Laura Palmer?", Choose Your Own Adventure, Fighting Fantasy, wood paneling, the Cabbage Patch riots, the L.A. riots, the Care Bear stare, the Walkman, TV show theme songs, mall concerts, horse girls, Dungeons!, *Headbangers Ball*, Baby Jessica, Space Shuttle Challenger, Memphis Group design, Brookstone, record stores, *The Joy of Painting*, passing notes in class

YOUR CORNER OF THE HOUSE

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| ☒ Headless Barbie | ☐ |
| ☐ Walkman | ☐ |
| ☐ TV Guide from 90's | ☐ |
| ☐ Crystal pendant | ☐ |
| ☐ | ☐ |
| ☐ | ☐ |
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- | |
|---|
| ☐ Did the Latchkeys |
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| ☒ Did you deliver a happened to you |
| ☐ Did you cut loose |

LATCHKEY MOV
At the beginning of the
Moves sheet. No two L

Sight + Be

VERTER ELECTRONICA PRESENTS

XXAFERUSTM

INSERT COIN(S) TO CONTINUE





PLAY STRUCTURE

Unlike many tabletop roleplaying games, *Public Access* has a strict play structure; there are four distinct phases of play—Dawn, Day, Dusk, and Night—and each serves a different gameplay purpose and/or has a distinct feel. The game is structured this way for several reasons, but the main one is this: following the structure helps create a cinematic story.

When playing *Public Access*, the Dawn phase leads directly to the Day phase, the Day phase leads directly to the Dusk phase, the Dusk phase leads directly to the Night phase, the Night phase leads directly to the Dawn phase, and so on. Note that a new Day phase doesn't necessarily mean it's the next day in the story; a Day phase can happen days or even weeks after the events of the previous Night phase.

DAWN

Perform the following steps in order:

1. Collect Rewards if a Threat was resolved.
2. Answer Dawn questions.
Mark new elective Dawn questions (or leave either or both the same).
3. Resolve any moves that are resolved during the Dawn phase.
4. Optional: Resolve any Key prompts that remain unresolved (players can choose to wait until a later time, unless this is the end of the session).

Dawn is an upkeep phase that takes place immediately after a Night phase.

DAY

Perform the following steps in order:

1. The Keeper presents a new mystery if there are less than three active mysteries.
2. Regular scenes commence, and continue until the Keeper decides to move to the Dusk phase.

Day is when new mysteries are presented by the Keeper and regular scenes commence; it takes place immediately after the Dawn phase. Of the four phases, Day is the one that feels most like every other tabletop roleplaying game: the Keeper frames up scenes (or players request them) and the players describe what their Latchkeys do in response.

The roleplaying conversation begins, moves are triggered and resolved, and gameplay continues like this until the Keeper decides to move to the Dusk phase, usually after each hunter has been the focus of one or two scenes.

Importantly, Day should feel unhurried. The Latchkeys can continue their investigations, have intimate scenes with other Latchkeys, trigger moves that are interesting to them, take actions that help them answer “yes” to a Dawn question, resolve a Key prompt, or simply show a little bit of their day-to-day life in Deep Lake, but in all cases, the scenes should have a casual feel. Finally, you cannot resolve a mystery during the Day phase.

DUSK

Perform the following steps, in order:

1. Resolve any moves that are resolved during the Dusk phase.
2. The players collectively decide if they're going to watch an Odyssey tape; if they can't come to a consensus, the Keeper decides.
3. Each player says what their Latchkey will be doing during the upcoming Night phase.
4. Optional: Resolve any Key prompts that remain unresolved (players can choose to wait until a later time, unless this is the end of a session).
5. The Keeper introduces the Odyssey tape by reading its opening text (if the players chose to watch one) and assigns the prompts.

Dusk is a short phase used to set up the Night phase. When players are deciding what their Latchkey wants to do during the Night phase, they should keep in mind whether or not the Latchkeys are watching an Odyssey tape. If they're not watching an Odyssey tape, they should expect their Latchkey can move around freely and engage in activities that involve more than one scene. If the players decide to watch an Odyssey tape, their Latchkey's actions are much more constrained for the Night phase: they can only do things in and around the Location where the tape is being watched, and whatever they do has to be something they can accomplish in the short periods of time between pausing and resuming the tape.

After each player has a chance to declare what their Latchkey will be doing for the Night phase, anyone who wishes to revise their plan may do so. The Keeper should discourage the players engaging in planning discussions (and, ideally, eliminate them entirely); the process is much easier and more streamlined if everyone simply speaks once and then makes one revision, if desired.

Odyssey tapes will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter, but for now, just know that they are tapes that the Latchkeys find in and around Deep Lake that show episodes from shows that aired on TV Odyssey. They are often strange and unsettling, and can even have an uncanny connection to the present day events in Deep Lake. The more Odyssey tapes the Latchkeys find and watch, the closer they get to figuring out what happened to TV Odyssey.

NIGHT

The Night phase can play out in one of two different ways, depending on whether the players chose to watch an Odyssey tape. If they chose not to watch an Odyssey tape:

1. Regular scenes commence, and continue until the Keeper decides to move to the next phase.

If they chose to watch an Odyssey tape:

1. A player resolves the first Odyssey tape prompt.
2. The Keeper frames up a scene for one or more Latchkeys; the scene is played out until each Latchkey who is a focus of the scene has had a chance to take or resolve an action.
3. Repeat Step 2 until each Latchkey has been the focus of a scene.
4. Repeat Steps 1 through 3 until there are no more Odyssey tape prompts, at which point the Night phase immediately ends.

If the players chose not to watch an Odyssey tape, the phase plays out in a very similar manner to the Day phase, except the stakes are higher: everything is a little faster and more dangerous than in the relatively unhurried Day phase. The Keeper will end the phase after each Latchkey has been the focus of one or two scenes.

If the players chose to watch an Odyssey tape, the focus of the Night phase is that tape. The tape gets "paused" between each prompt so the player can show how their Latchkey is reacting, or perform some small action. These Latchkey scenes are extremely brief: the Latchkeys can't wander off too far and they can't get involved in something that would take longer than a bathroom break to resolve; dice will rarely get rolled. When watching an Odyssey tape, the Night phase shouldn't last longer than twenty to thirty minutes of real-world time.

THE ODYSSEY TAPES

In the world of *Public Access*, the Odyssey tapes are rare VHS tapes containing individual episodes from the programs that aired on TV Odyssey. There's a small subculture of people who collect these tapes and puzzle over their meaning, particularly as it relates to the mystery of TV Odyssey itself. Indeed, the Deep Lake Latchkeys are trying to find these tapes for that purpose. As the Latchkeys find and watch more Odyssey tapes, they get closer to learning the truth.

At the game table, an Odyssey tape is a series of narrative prompts that, when answered, paint a picture in the minds of the Keeper and the players about what's on the tape. Odyssey tapes help satisfy a number of gameplay and narrative goals in *Public Access*: _____





Odyssey tapes are a campaign timer. The Keeper's campaign structure is influenced by the number of Odyssey tapes that have been watched, with the campaign entering its end phase once that number reaches ten.

Odyssey tapes are a Night phase timer. The Night phase ends shortly after the Odyssey tape ends.

Odyssey tapes are an avenue for investigation. Certain moves and game conditions allow the Latchkeys to interact with the scenes taking place on the Odyssey tapes.

Odyssey tapes create space for the uncanny. Players who have marked **The Sandstone Arch** are incentivized to create strange and unsettling connections between the main storyline and the events depicted in the Odyssey tapes (see Signals from the Other Side).

Odyssey tapes are there to creep you out. Odyssey tapes focus on surreal, bizarre, and downright terrifying subject matter; they're inspired by urban legends and internet creepypasta stories. When players answer the Odyssey tape prompts, they're creating their own little collaborative horror story, and the effect can be unnerving or even scary.

So-called "white" Odyssey tapes are near-mythical artifacts in the subculture that investigates the mystery of TV Odyssey. According to some, a white Odyssey tape is a direct connection to the "pure-white signal," a psychic, or possibly magical, phenomenon or process whereby a person can contact the Other Side. What is the Other Side? That's also speculation: some believe it's the afterlife, others think it's an alternate dimension; most believe it has something to do with whatever happened to TV Odyssey. In gameplay terms, when a player marks **The Pure-White Signal**, their Latchkey is retired from play. This is memorialized by watching a white Odyssey tape, presented by the Keeper. A white Odyssey tape is a regular Odyssey tape, but a character in the prompt is replaced with the Latchkey retiring from the game.



SIGNALS FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Players who have marked **The Sandstone Arch** on their character sheet have access to a new Dawn question: "Did you receive a Signal from the Other Side?" A Signal from the Other Side is when a player narrates something from an Odyssey tape into a scene in present-day Deep Lake, and vice-versa. The connection between the Odyssey tape and present-day Deep Lake can be subtle or ephemeral, or it can be very direct and unmistakable. The idea is to create an uncanny world where the reality of the Odyssey tapes and the reality of Deep Lake, New Mexico start to blend. Some examples of receiving a Signal from the Other Side:

During an Odyssey tape, Oli describes a kid riding a bright red bicycle. Later, while describing how her Latchkey breaks into the house on Escondido Street, Susana describes her Latchkey moving a rusty red bicycle out of their way. The rusty red bicycle is a Signal from the Other Side, and Susana would get to answer that Dawn question affirmatively (if the question is unlocked on her character sheet).

During an Odyssey tape about a cooking show, Oli describes the host of the cooking show making a casserole using cans of Spaghetti-Os. Later, when the tape is paused, Oli describes his Latchkey going for a snack only to open the cupboard and find stacks of Spaghetti-O cans there. In this instance, the Spaghetti-Os are a Signal from the Other Side.

The Latchkeys are being pursued by a serial killer in a bear costume. They manage to escape, and later, during an Odyssey tape about walking in nature, Oli describes how a bear walks into the frame of the Odyssey tape scene. The bear on the tape is a Signal from the Other Side.





The remainder of the book is presented as if the game designer is speaking directly to the Keeper, and so the tone and presentation is a bit less formal than in previous chapters.

Your Role

This is a game about investigating supernatural mysteries in a remote New Mexico town. You'll present the basics of a mystery to the Deep Lake Latchkeys, who will then begin an investigation, gathering clues to help them figure out what's going on and to put to rest whatever danger or lingering problem is associated with the mystery. If you have played other tabletop roleplaying games where the characters solve mysteries, much of *Public Access* will feel familiar. However, there are three significant differences with most of those games you need to be aware of:

- The clues are not located in specific places, and, in fact, can be found wherever the Latchkeys are looking.
- You don't know the ultimate truth behind any of the mysteries until the players do the Answer a Question move.
- The mysteries are loosely connected to a larger story involving the literal disappearance of a public access TV station called TV Odyssey.

In addition to presenting the mysteries and managing the overarching story about TV Odyssey, you are generally responsible for portraying the world around the Latchkeys. This means you give voice to all the various characters they interact with, you describe elements of a scene when needed, you challenge them with dangers and obstacles, and you show how the world reacts to the actions they take.

You have a lot of responsibility as the Keeper, but understand that you don't have to be a creative genius or improvisational wizard to run *Public Access*. Mystery sheets, the TV Odyssey sheet, and this text not only help you keep the game organized, but also provide you with loads of inspirational details; there are many instances when it is the players' responsibility to describe the game world rather than yours; and, if all else fails, you can take a break to think about what should happen in the story, or even ask the players for their ideas.



Finally, while everyone is responsible for making sure everyone else is having a good time and maintaining each others' boundaries of safety and consent, it is your responsibility before play begins to make sure the players understand what kinds of subject matter might come up in *Public Access*.

This game frequently explores dark and provocative themes—murder, drug abuse, ritual sacrifice, child endangerment, and body horror, among others—and you need to make sure players understand what they are getting into. If you know your normal playgroup isn't likely to handle these subjects with care or respect, you need to be honest with yourself about that (and possibly not offer *Public Access* as an option on your regular game night).

If you're running *Public Access* at a convention or in some sort of public space, like a Twitch stream, you need to exercise extra care when presenting the game to players and/or viewers.

Managing the Play Structure

One of your most important jobs as the Keeper is managing the game's play structure. Below is advice for how to run each of the game's phases.

Running the Dawn phase

Dawn is a short, simple upkeep phase; just do the steps listed in the Play Structure chapter and you'll be fine. The main piece of advice I would give you for this phase involves answering Dawn questions, which is: be generous. Sometimes it won't be clear if a player is able to answer "yes" to a Dawn question, and so you might have to weigh in. Strive to be expansive and open-minded—look for an opportunity to give the player credit for the Dawn question. If you still can't get to a "yes," then say so, but tell the player what they might have done differently in a scene in order to get that XP.

Running the Day phase

It's really important you follow the players' leads when it comes to the Day phase. This is their time to explore the game and story in the way that is most interesting to them. They may want to continue their investigations, or they may want to have lower-stakes scenes that serve to develop their Latchkey's personality or personal agenda. Always be honest about what is possible at any given time, but do your best to give them the scenes they want.

After you have introduced a new mystery (provided there are fewer than three when the Day phase starts), the best way to get things rolling is to simply go around the table and ask: "What would you like to do?" You may want to frame up a scene immediately after they give you an answer, or you might want to hold back and hear out the other players first, especially if the first player requested a scene with another Latchkey. Once a scene is framed, meaning you describe where it takes place and what's going on when the Latchkeys arrive, ask them: "What do you do?" Things should pretty much take off from there: the conversation with the players begins, Latchkeys start taking actions, moves are triggered, and so forth.

The Day phase is intentionally unhurried and casual. Because of this, it's important that you keep the spotlight moving; spending too long on one Latchkey's scene can make the other players get bored or feel resentful. Cut in the middle of an ongoing scene to ask another Latchkey what they're up to. Get that second Latchkey's scene going and then cut to another Latchkey, or return to the original Latchkey. The important thing is to just keep moving around the table; never spend more than five to ten minutes on a scene before cutting away to check in with another character.

End the Day phase whenever it feels right. In my experience, that's after each Latchkey has had one or two full scenes. A full Day phase should take one-and-a-half to two hours to complete.

One last note about the Day phase: the day in question may not always follow directly from the night that came before. Decide how much time has passed between the Night phase and the Day phase and tell the players. For example, if they have just resolved a mystery, it might make sense for a decent amount of time to pass—a few days, a week or two, even a month.

Running the Dusk phase

Dusk is a fairly short set-up phase; just do the steps listed in the Play Structure chapter and things will go smoothly. The part you'll want to pay close attention to is when players tell you what their Latchkey wants to do during the upcoming Night phase. They each get to speak once, and then make one revision after they hear what everyone else has to say. Some groups tend to fall into groupthink at this stage, or they think the Latchkeys have to always be together ("Don't split the party!"). Gently remind players that they absolutely do not have to go along with what other players are doing, and that they can safely explore the dark corners of Deep Lake on their own because, so long as they can turn a Key, their Latchkey cannot be killed.

If the players choose to watch an Odyssey tape during the Night phase, be sure to remind them that their Latchkey's actions for the phase are confined to wherever the tape is being watched, and that they can only set out to do things that can be accomplished in a short period of time.



RUNNING THE NIGHT PHASE

no Odyssey tape

If the players decline to watch an Odyssey tape (or if they don't have one to watch), the Night phase is similar to the Day phase, with some key differences:

- You don't have to frame scenes that conform to what the Latchkeys want to do. (I like to say to players, "The Day phase belongs to you, but the Night phase belongs to me.") The players get to say what they'd *like* to do, but it's your decision as Keeper whether to honor their wishes.
- Night is more dangerous. The situations and antagonists the Latchkeys have been ignoring take the opportunity of cover of night to torment them. Your reactions to what the Latchkeys are doing should be deadlier, and your descriptions of scene elements should be darker and more feral.
- The Night phase is a little shorter. While not as short as when the players decide to watch an Odyssey tape, a Night phase without an Odyssey tape should still feel a little tighter than a Day phase. I like to end such a Night phase after each Latchkey has had the chance to do one full scene, roughly one hour of play time.

Odyssey tape

Here's where things get a little unusual. First: if it hasn't already been decided, determine where the Odyssey tape is being watched. Each mystery has a Location with a VHS machine and television, and so long as the Latchkeys have access to that Location, they can watch an Odyssey tape there. If the players have no particular opinion about where to watch the tape, or if they don't say, assume the tape is being watched at the house on Rodenbecker Street, which is the default place to do so. If the tape is being watched at a different Location, be mindful of whatever special actions or rules are in play while a tape is being watched at that Location. Finally, note that a tape can be watched at a Location even after the mystery that Location is attached to has been resolved.





Be mindful of how watching an Odyssey tape is almost like a mini-game within the main game: it has a different feel, a different pace, and a different objective. The focus of a Night phase during which an Odyssey tape is being watched is the Odyssey tape itself. Latchkey scenes between the Odyssey tape prompts should be *extremely short*—no one should speak more than a few sentences—and die rolls should be kept to a minimum; the entire Night phase should be wrapped up in twenty to thirty minutes. Your job is to enforce this pace. Let the players linger on the details of the Odyssey tape prompt they're narrating—that's what we're here for—but do quick and aggressive cuts between the Latchkeys when the tape is paused. The purpose of Latchkey scenes between Odyssey tape prompts is to just show how the Latchkeys are reacting and to give players a chance to narrate Signals from the Other Side. If a Latchkey is taking an action that would trigger a die roll, such as investigating part of the house on Escondido Street in between watching sections of the tape, then that action should be stretched out, and the die roll should happen near the end of the phase.

This pacing can be tricky for groups new to the game, but it's fairly intuitive after doing it a couple of times. Let's set up an example: our Latchkeys are Ryan, Georgina, and Micah (and for purposes of this example, players are always referred to by their Latchkey's name, even when they are speaking as players). During the Dusk phase, they decided to watch "Happy Jack 06 Duress Signal," a tape they found in the house on Escondido Street; they will be watching it in the TV room of the same house. The Keeper reads the introductory text of the Odyssey tape and the Night phase begins...



Keeper: Ok, the tape is running, let's Paint the Scene.

Going around the table, and following the directions of the first prompt, each Latchkey describes a little bit of the basement that is the focus of "Happy Jack 06 Duress Signal," focusing on the details that would look out of place in a forest.

Keeper: Let's pause the tape there. Micah, what are you doing right now?

Micah: I get up from the couch in the TV room and step outside to have a cigarette—watching the tape is a little stressful, especially while doing so in an abandoned house.

Keeper: What about you, Ryan? You said you wanted to keep investigating the house while watching the tape.

Ryan: Yeah, I'm going to head to Elliot's room and start rummaging through the closet.

Keeper: Ok, let's say you're doing that. Georgina?

Georgina: I'm going to see what people online are saying about the Rappaports' disappearance, maybe try my Who Ya Gonna Call? move. My cell phone has mobile hotspot capabilities so my computer can get online.

Keeper: Sounds good. Let's hit play and watch a little more of the tape. Micah, you're up.

Micah narrates the second prompt, which was assigned to him during the Dusk phase. He takes a few minutes to roleplay as Happy Jack, describing how the bizarre puppet is low-key tormenting this little girl in the tape, identified as Lucy. As Happy Jack, he explains that Lucy's parents stopped loving her because she wets the bed. He then describes the "Awww!" sound of a prerecorded audience playing on the tape, as if reacting with dismay at Lucy's predicament.

Keeper: Ok, let's pause the tape. Micah, are you going to go back out to the porch to finish that cigarette?

Micah: Yeah. Can we say while I'm out there, I'm looking around the front yard a little bit, to see if we missed anything earlier in the day?

Keeper: Sure, you can be doing that. We'll roll the Meddling Move later to see if you find anything. Speaking of: Ryan, go ahead and roll the Meddling Move for rummaging through Elliot's closet.

The Keeper

Ryan: Ok. I think Reason makes the most sense here, or maybe Composure because I'm doing this in a creepy-ass abandoned house while watching a creepy-ass tape about a creepy-ass puppet?

Keeper: Definitely Composure.

Ryan: [rolls dice] I got a 10!

Keeper: Ok. I'll tell you what you find later. Georgina, go ahead and roll Who Ya Gonna Call?.

Georgina: [rolls dice] I got an 8.

Keeper: Ok, we'll talk about that in a bit. In the meantime, let's hit play on the tape. Ryan, what's happening with Happy Jack and Lucy?

Ryan narrates the third prompt, which was assigned to him during the Dusk phase. He describes how Sylvester the Squirrel is now on screen for the Lesson of the Day. The Lesson of the Day, explained in Ryan's best Happy Jack voice, is that parents who stop loving their children should be punished, especially when parents stop loving their children for things their children can't control, like wetting the bed. Lucy asks, "How do I do that?" Happy Jack says, "Like this!" and then the hand of the puppeteer controlling Happy Jack takes a kitchen knife and starts stabbing Sylvester the Squirrel to death. The audience recording lets out a cheer of celebration.

Keeper: Let's pause the tape there. Micah, how are you exploring the yard?

Micah: I find an old toolbox out there and start going through it. Weirdly, buried among the hammers and screwdrivers is a kitchen knife with a carved handle in the shape of a squirrel. [Everyone makes a mental note that Micah has received a Signal from the Other Side] I'm not sure if that's relevant to anything, but I'm hoping I might find some clue as to what happened to the Rappaports.

Keeper: Roll the Meddling Move with Reason.

Micah: [rolls dice] I got a 7.

Keeper: I'll give you your Clue in a bit, but I will tell you that you accidentally cut yourself on one of the tools in the toolbox and take the Condition: Sliced Hand.

Micah: Yikes!

Keeper: Ryan, while rummaging through Eliot's closet, you find the weirdest Candyland board you've ever seen. It has characters you don't remember from when you were a kid: the Toffee Duke, the Ravenous Sugarpig, the Licorice Beastie, the Peanut Butter Sphinx, and more. That's your Clue.

Ryan: Interesting...

Keeper: Georgina, you make contact with someone on the *Ghost Bro* forums. What do you ask them?

Georgina: Basically, I want to know if they have heard about the disappearance of the Rappaports, and in particular, do they know anything about the little girl, Abigail.

Keeper: This guy might know something, but he's not going to tell you what you want to know unless you agree to send him some pictures of the house. Sending him the pictures is easy enough to do, but it might draw unwanted attention from people monitoring those forums.

Georgina: I'm ok with that.

Keeper: Ok. Take the Condition: Being Watched. Let's go ahead and hit play for the last time. Georgina, you're up.

Georgina narrates the last part of the *Odyssey* tape. She describes how the basement in the scene goes dark. Lucy leans into the camera and whispers: "I know you're looking for us. I know you're at that little girl's house. Whatever you do, don't take any pictures. And if you've already taken pictures, never, ever, EVER send them to anyone who asks. No matter how nice they ask you, no matter what they promise you."

[Everyone oohs and aahs at Georgina's Signal from the Other Side.]

Keeper: And with that, the tape stops. Let's wrap things up. Micah, you had to cut up your hand to get it, but you found a copy of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* in the toolbox. Kinda weird, but that's your Clue. Ryan, are you going to keep the weird Candyland board?

Oli: Yep! Can I add it to My Corner of the House?

Keeper: Hmm... sure, why not. Georgina, take your pictures—if you dare—and we'll settle up with the guy on the forum later.

Susana: Sounds good!

Keeper: That concludes the Night phase! Let's go to the Dawn.

A few helpful observations from the example:

- No Latchkey was able to fire off more than one move during the phase; indeed, for each Latchkey, the entire phase was spent leading up to and then resolving a single move.
- The Keeper used words like “pause” and “play” to signal transitions between the Odyssey tape scene and the Latchkey scenes. I find this is a nice way to reinforce what the phase is about and to get everyone in the headspace of their characters watching an old VHS tape.
- Players narrated Signals from the Other Side going in both directions: things from the tape showed up in the real world and things in the real world appeared on the tape.



ANATOMY OF A MYSTERY

You'll always have at least one mystery to track at all times. Mysteries are managed using mystery sheets that contain all the important elements you need to run that mystery. I recommend you spend fifteen minutes or so reading a mystery before you actually run it, and if you can spend a little more time, all the better: the mystery sheet is a "toy box" of elements for you to run a session, but it's also a way of "learning" the setting—the setting of Deep Lake, and the specific setting of the mystery.

What follows is a quick breakdown of each part of a mystery sheet. Some mysteries deviate slightly from this structure or have elements that are unique to that mystery; we're going to ignore that stuff and focus on the elements that are common to most mysteries.

① Title

The title of a mystery is never withheld from the players—tell them what it's called.

② Presenting the Mystery

This section features italicized text introducing the basics of the mystery. When you have to present a new mystery during the Day phase, you do so by simply reading this text. This section also frequently has a question or two that you pose to a Latchkey. The purpose of asking these questions is usually to give the Latchkeys a hook into the mystery.

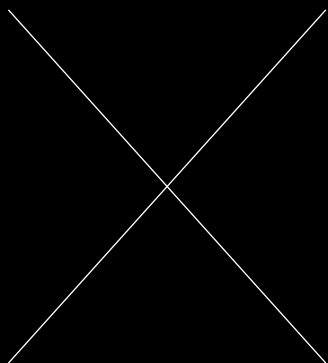
③ Questions & Opportunities

Questions represent puzzles the Latchkeys are trying to solve. What's really going on here? How can we make this dangerous or weird thing stop? What happened to those missing kids? Latchkeys solve these puzzles by gathering Clues and triggering the Answer a Question move. Questions also have a Complexity score, representing how difficult they are to answer.

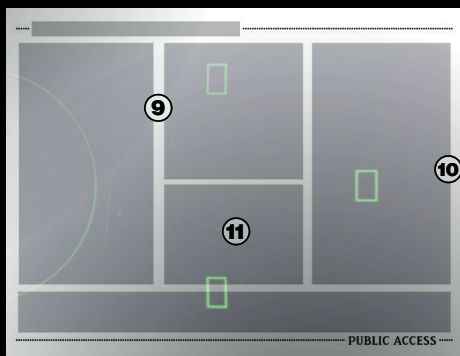
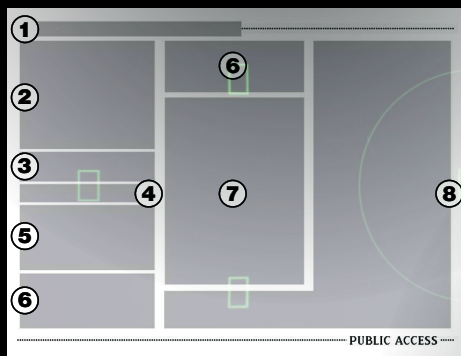
If the Answer a Question move is successful, the associated Opportunity is unlocked. Opportunities usually involve resolving the mystery (often by putting a stop to whatever strange forces are plaguing the town or giving someone in the town a sense of closure), but they can also represent other things, like unlocking new moves or giving the Latchkeys access to new items and characters.

The only way to resolve a mystery is to successfully Answer a Question and then pursue its Opportunity. If, before they unlock the Opportunity, the Latchkeys encounter a threat the existence of which makes it impossible to resolve the mystery, they can battle it or attempt to stop it, but they will never be rid of it completely—the threat slips away at the last moment or simply reemerges at a later time.

Finally, the inherent danger of pursuing an Opportunity is inversely proportional to the Complexity of its Question. So, a Question with Complexity 4 is fairly easy to answer, but pursuing that Opportunity should be much more dangerous than the one whose Question has Complexity 8.



NOTE: DIAGRAM BASED ON THE HOUSE ON ESCONDIDO STREET



④ The Key

Most mysteries have their own Key. When a Latchkey turns a Key in order to improve the result of a die roll, they can mark a Key associated with a mystery they are actively investigating rather than mark the Key of the Child or the Key of Desolation. A mystery-specific Key can usually only be selected once total, and frequently requires all Latchkeys to narrate something, not just the Latchkey who marked it. In the case of turning a Key in order to get a better result on Answer a Question, marking this Key only counts for the player who marked it—the other players still have to mark a Key from their character sheet.

⑤ Moments

These are colorful bits that you can sprinkle in wherever needed. They reinforce the mystery's themes and, frankly, make you look like a rock star Keeper whenever you drop them into a scene.

⑥ The Central Threat

For example, the house in The House on Escondido Street. This section contains a description of the character or entity that is central to the mystery. It will usually have information about what they look like, how they behave, and what sorts of supernatural abilities they have. It may contain a quote if the threat is sentient. Importantly, it contains information about what will happen if the Latchkeys ignore it. At the beginning of every session, review this part of the mystery sheet; if the Latchkeys go one or more Day/ Night cycles without pursuing the mystery, think about how this central threat might make their lives more difficult.

⑦ Dangers

These are additional dangers associated with the mystery, usually supernatural or monstrous attacks, or third parties interested in stopping the Latchkeys. Importantly, this is not an exhaustive list, but a jumping off point; use it to inspire your own creations and improvisations.

⑧ Locations

These are places which are connected to the mystery in some way. Each contains a short description plus a Paint the Scene question posed to everyone at the table the first time the Location is visited. Paint the Scene is a Keeper technique wherein you ask the players, sometimes out-of-character, a question about a place, the answers to which help explore a theme or idea associated with that place.

Locations can be highly localized, such as the rooms in the house that is the focus of *The House on Escondido Street*, or spread over a much wider geographical area, such as the various spots around the lake in *The Deep Lake Lurker*. Importantly, the list of Locations is not exhaustive; use it to inspire your own creations and improvisations.

⑨ Side Characters

These are the non-player characters who are most likely to turn up during the mystery (though it is not necessarily an exhaustive list). Each Suspect has a name, three descriptive details, a short explanation of their personality or motives, and a quote to inspire your roleplaying.

⑩ Clues

These are uncovered during certain moves. When it comes time to reveal a Clue, scan the list and pick the one that makes the most sense in the moment or is the one you find most interesting, and work it into the story. Clues are written to be diverse and flexible—you should be able to find something that fits. Also, you can change the Clue or add to it as much as you wish (just be careful your changes and additions don't cause the Clue to answer a Question by itself).

⑪ Rewards

Each mystery sheet has a list of Rewards the Latchkeys can claim if they resolve the mystery. Rewards are claimed during the Dawn phase. Each Latchkey picks a single Reward, marking it off when they do so; no Reward can be taken by two different Latchkeys, though some of them are repeats.



KEEPER PRINCIPLES

This section explains the general principles you should bear in mind when running a game of *Public Access*. You will occasionally find yourself in a situation that isn't explicitly covered by the rules or where you need to make up something on the fly. So long as you are following the Keeper principles, your improvisations will come across as authentic and fair.

The Keeper principles are:

- Play to find out what happens
- Make the world and everyone in it seem real
- Be a fan of the Deep Lake Latchkeys
- Sometimes, disclaim decision-making
- Keep it nostalgic
- Make the nighttime dangerous
- Embrace the weird
- Present terror in a matter-of-fact way

Play to find out what happens

You have a mystery, a cast of Side Characters, and a list of Clues, but none of it is set in stone. Be willing to let the session unfurl on its own terms. If a player has a cool idea that doesn't quite match what's on the mystery sheet, go with it. In fact, many parts of the game will explicitly challenge your preconceived ideas—answers to establishing questions, answers to Paint the Scene questions, and various moves, to name a few—so be flexible and ready to incorporate things you hadn't considered.

Make the world and everything in it seem real

Describe the world in sensory-rich detail. You have some help here: the Side Characters in a mystery each come with three descriptive details and notes on how to play them, and key mystery Locations have Paint the Scene questions to help enrich the scene. Use these as a foundation for how you approach everything in the world. Give non-player characters not listed among the Side Characters three descriptive details to bring them alive; create a Paint the Scene question for a place that takes on sudden importance.

Be a fan of the Deep Lake Latchkeys

This doesn't mean "let them win." It means "give them challenges that make you root for them."

Sometimes, disclaim decision-making

You are co-creating the story with the players. Let them chime-in to flesh out the world, describe things they see, and get invested in what's happening. Also: when you aren't sure how to react, ask the table for advice.

Keep it nostalgic

This is a very important principle for capturing the feel of the game. Don't let dangerous scenes take up the whole session, and don't always focus on the disturbing aspects of a mystery. Reveal and discuss those things as needed—or as required by the mechanics—but look for opportunities to return to the nostalgic and kitschy aspects of the setting: encourage Latchkeys to talk about the things they loved (and feared) as a child; push them towards the Nostalgic Move, especially if they have a Condition; and ask lots of questions about Deep Lake itself, and their memories of it.

Make the nighttime dangerous

The above principle aside, any scenes at night should be heightened by a sense of dread or pregnant with grim portent. This is necessary to show the Latchkeys this is a dangerous business they're getting up to, and to make sure the story has real stakes.

Embrace the weird

Deep Lake is a weird town: an entire building vanished a decade earlier and no one can remember it even being there. TV Odyssey and Channel 94 seem to only exist in the minds of some internet enthusiasts and a set of rare VHS tapes. Speaking of those tapes, who made them? Why are they all over the place? And who is the Big Man that's watching the Latchkeys' every move? You don't need all the answers for Deep Lake's weirdness; the purpose of the game is to find those answers. Rather, you should play up the strange aspects of the setting: highlight the incongruencies, emphasize the strange behavior of the locals, and make everything feel uncanny.

Present terror in a matter-of-fact way

The temptation is to present terror in a "scary" manner—perhaps with exaggerated, Vincent Price-esque mannerisms. Unless you feel particularly confident in your ability to be "scary" at the table, you should present creepy things in a calm, measured, matter-of-fact way. That calm, plain presentation will itself stand in contrast to the things being described, which is its own kind of creepy. The players' imaginations will do the rest.

KEEPER REACTIONS

You will frequently be asked to define and narrate complications resulting from a die roll, or otherwise “react” to a situation. Generally-speaking, a good reaction is one that complicates a Latchkey’s life in an interesting way and follows logically from the established fiction. Think of a natural reaction based on what’s happening in the story, or choose a reaction from the list below, modifying as needed. You’ll also have access to new reactions as the campaign progresses (see TV Odyssey, p.47). No matter what, always follow up with, “What do you do?”

- Separate the Latchkeys
- Kill a Side Character
- Inflict a Condition
- Put a Latchkey in danger
- Describe a Latchkey being killed
- Remove an item from their Corner of the House
- Let them find an Odyssey tape
- Have an official show up



Separate the Latchkeys

The Latchkeys will usually want to stay together, so complicate their lives by separating one or more of them from the group. Are the Latchkeys looking around a creepy house in the suburbs? Perhaps one of them enters a one-way secret passage. Are they getting nosy in the middle of a backyard barbecue? Have a guest come whisk one of them away. Are they snooping around a cabin in the woods? Maybe a shadowy figure locks one of them in the cellar. The important thing is that whatever happens next to the separated Latchkey(s) should be fascinating or perilous.

Kill a Side Character

Nothing will get the Latchkeys' (and players') attention like having a Side Character turn up dead, especially if it's in a gruesome manner. This reaction is particularly effective if the Latchkeys are starting to get close to resolving a mystery or, conversely, if they have been ignoring the mystery entirely. Note that this is a very strong Keeper reaction, and really only appropriate as the result of a missed roll.

Inflict a Condition

This is a trusty, go-to Keeper reaction for nearly any situation. A Condition is a one-word adjective or short phrase, and it should follow directly from whatever just happened in the story. For example, if a Latchkey got side-swiped by a car peeling away from the scene, you might give them the Condition: Banged-up. If they just had a very frustrating, condescending conversation with local law enforcement, you might give them the Condition: Irritated. If they are having a little too much fun at a neighborhood party, you might give them the Condition: Had One Too Many. A Condition can be cleared by the use of the Nostalgic Move, or because you think it's appropriate given the circumstances.

Put a Latchkey in danger

"Danger" can mean physical danger or something else. Is a Latchkey sneaking into a warehouse after hours? Maybe a shadowy figure trains a gun on her and tells her to go back where she came from. Are the Latchkeys tagging along with a fishing tour in order to question the tour operator? Maybe a powerful storm suddenly appears on the horizon. Is a Latchkey trying to show off at Xxaagreus? Maybe the dip switch is currently set to Hard.

Show a Latchkey being killed

Kill a Latchkey! It's totally fine. Make it gruesome, if you want. The players can always turn a Key to get a fictional do-over. Note that this is a strong reaction that is only appropriate as the result of a missed roll, and even then only if it was adequately telegraphed as a possibility beforehand, such as in the Day or Night Move, or in a conversation between the Keeper and player that preceded a roll. This reaction is never appropriate as the result of a missed Meddling Move roll.

Remove an item from Their Corner of the House

Just like inflicting a Condition, this is a very dependable, go-to reaction for many situations. If they were using something from Their Corner of the House, have them lose it—it breaks, it gets stolen, it gets misplaced, etc.

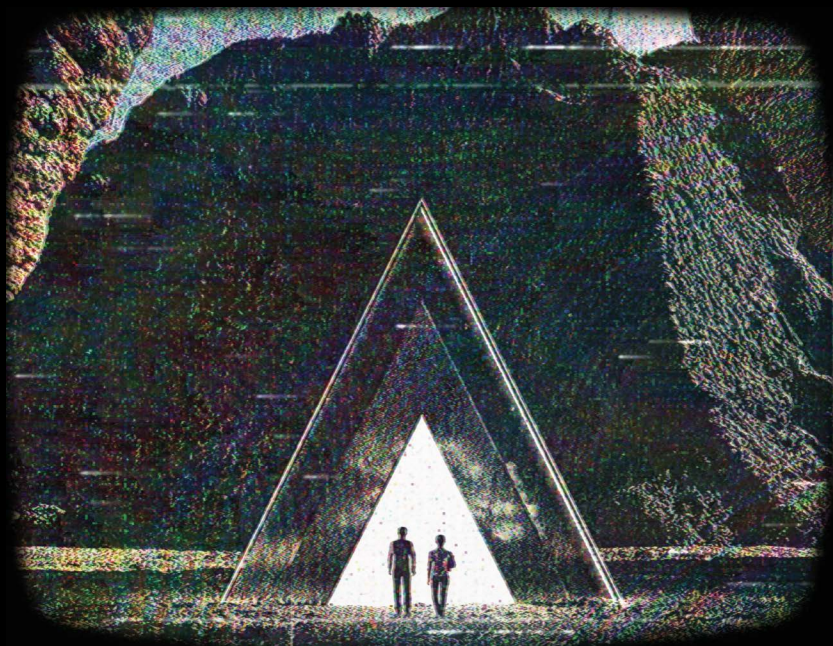
Let them find an Odyssey tape

You don't have to wait for a 12+ on the Meddling Move to give the Latchkeys an Odyssey tape. You can give them a tape just because it feels right in the moment, or because the Latchkeys haven't encountered one in awhile. I like to give them at least one per session, regardless of how the dice go.

Have an official show up

This reaction is a very important horror genre convention and should be used liberally. The idea is that an official, usually a member of local law enforcement, shows up and interferes with the Latchkeys' investigation in some way. Note that we use the term "official" very loosely here—anyone with authority over the situation will do. A nosy maitre'd can be just as troublesome in a fancy restaurant as a surly sheriff's deputy can be during a traffic stop.





TV O DYSSEY

THE TV ODYSSEY CAMPAIGN

A tabletop roleplaying game campaign is a series of interconnected play sessions that constitutes an overall story for your game, one that usually culminates in a final, dramatic confrontation or challenge. In most roleplaying games, a campaign can theoretically last forever: the characters can keep advancing, and new villains and problems arise to replace the ones that have been resolved. In *Public Access*, by contrast, the campaign has a definite end point: after the Latchkeys resolve the mystery surrounding TV Odyssey.

The TV Odyssey campaign has three major components you're responsible for: the Big Man, the TV Odyssey sheet, and the TV Odyssey mystery. As you read through this chapter, you might come to believe that the campaign elements are more than you can handle, or that you're going to get something wrong; you might find the idea of portraying the Big Man to be daunting, or writing the TV Odyssey mystery to be something that only "creative" people can do. I'm going to show you how to use and manage the various campaign elements, but at the outset, please keep the following in mind: you've totally got this. Working with the TV Odyssey campaign is fun, and there are no wrong answers. Just keep the following ideas in mind:

Pay attention. Manage the conversation, adjudicate moves, run your mysteries, do reactions—all the things from the previous chapters—but also: pay attention. What sorts of ideas are resonating with the players? Are there Side Characters or Dangers the players seem to enjoy? Did you have a big "whoa!" moment during a session? Pay attention to what's working and consider how you might weave those details into the broader campaign story.

Think often and revise often. You have time between play sessions. Think about what it all means. What happened to TV Odyssey? Who is the Big Man? How do the mysteries connect to TV Odyssey? Who are the Great Hungers? How do the Latchkeys' traumatic memories fit in? Take notes if you think it would be helpful, but more than anything just *ponder*. Come up with theories about what you think is going on, but leave room for revision based on things that get revealed from session to session.

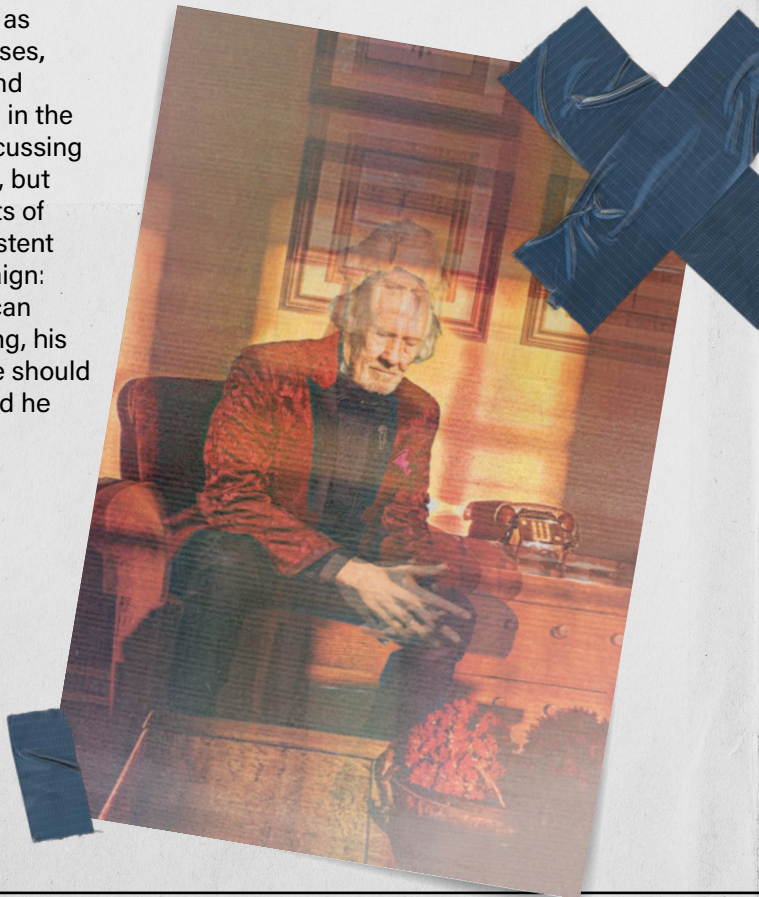
The players want you to succeed. This is the most important thing. The players are there to have a good time, and anything you do, so long as it's *honest* and in keeping with your Keeper principles from the previous chapter, is going to be great in their eyes.



THE BIG MAN

Public Access doesn't have a central villain or cataclysmic event to act as a driver of the story. Instead, it has the Big Man, a mysterious entity who is a constant presence in the campaign. But who is the Big Man, exactly? Is he an angel, guiding the Latchkeys to the truth of TV Odyssey? Is he a demon, delighting in the misfortune the Latchkeys suffer? Is he a cosmic explorer, like Doctor Who? Is he Phineas Whateley, the founder of TV Odyssey, in disguise? Is he from another dimension? Is he a ghost? Is he a memory—of the land, of the people—given form? The answer is we don't know—yet. Part of your job as the Keeper is to come up with a theory for who the Big Man is and what his relationship is to the weirdness of Deep Lake, the strange history of Degoya County, and, ultimately, to the disappearance of TV Odyssey.

The Big Man changes as the campaign progresses, and his appearance and behaviors are detailed in the upcoming section discussing the TV Odyssey sheet, but there are some aspects of him that remain consistent throughout the campaign: he is an observer, he can appear without warning, his appearance in a scene should delight the players, and he can reveal Clues.



01:00 AM **94**



The Big Man is an observer

The Big Man observes what's going on in Deep Lake. He knows things, but he's coy about revealing what he knows: he speaks cryptically, and prefers to let the Latchkeys find their own answers rather than telling them things outright. He also operates on a meta level from time to time, speaking directly to the players. The best way to think about the Big Man's role in the story is to consider the character of the Log Lady in the TV series *Twin Peaks*. The Log Lady was a resident of the town of Twin Peaks, and was involved in some of the show's mysteries, but she was also a narrator, speaking directly to viewers at the top of each episode. In all cases, she was mysterious and weird. That's the vibe you want to aim for when it comes to the Big Man.

The Big Man can appear without warning

The Big Man can appear anywhere, anytime, even if his presence in a space would be implausible (or even impossible). The Latchkeys might be crawling around 18 Escondido Street, believing it to be totally abandoned, only to find the Big Man sitting on the couch, waiting for them in the dark. A Latchkey might enter a long-hidden crawl space and discover the Big Man at the end of it, looming over them. A Latchkey might hop in the car one day and find the Big Man sitting in the passenger seat, smoking a cigarette. The Big Man is an uncanny character, and his ability to insert himself in the middle of the action is part of that.

17:02 FM **76**

The Big Man should delight the players

The Big Man should be fun. He's weird and cryptic, yes, but he's also likable. He is connected to the mysteries and dangers of the world, but he's not overtly antagonistic. He can appear anywhere, anytime, but he never overstays his welcome. When thinking about how to make the Big Man likable, consider how you characterize him, especially his voice and mannerisms (I like to play him with a high, whistle-y voice because it juxtaposes nicely with his size, but you can do whatever you think is fun).

The Big Man can reveal Clues

Sometimes you really want to give the Latchkeys a certain Clue but you can't think of a good way to reveal it in the moment. This is where the Big Man can be really handy, because you can just have him show up and say the Clue aloud or point it out to the Latchkey (and at a certain point the Latchkeys can seek him out directly for this purpose). I wouldn't do this all the time, but it's a good approach every now and then, especially for particularly strange Clues.

THE TV ODYSSEY SHEET

The TV Odyssey sheet is your main tool for managing the campaign. The TV Odyssey campaign is divided into five layers. Each successive layer represents the Latchkeys getting closer to the truth of what happened to TV Odyssey. In this section, I'm going to discuss how each layer affects the overarching narrative of your campaign, the new Keeper reactions you have available, the special events that are triggered, and how the Big Man appears and behaves. You will need a copy of the TV Odyssey sheet to follow along.

Please note that the number of viewed Odyssey tapes needed to unlock each layer is a running total that you track throughout your campaign, and that opening a new layer doesn't mean the previous layer is closed—you can bounce between any unlocked layers freely when thinking about how to react in a scene.

LAYER ONE: THE OLD RELIGION

Comic book movies usually have scenes that play after the credits roll. These stinger scenes are meant to keep viewers excited about where the story will go next. The Big Man scene functions in the exact same way in *Public Access*: we get to be audience members for a moment, to get excited for what's coming next. Importantly, the Big Man scene is something we get to enjoy completely out of character—the Latchkeys have no idea what's happening.

While Layer One has a prescribed Big Man scene that happens at a specific time in the campaign, there's nothing stopping you from having more of these end-of-session scenes. As the campaign develops, create your own stinger scenes to deepen the story, explore the lore of the setting, increase the weirdness level, and/or to get your players excited about the next session.

Layer One also asks you to start making notes about where you think the campaign is headed—your initial theories about TV Odyssey and the Big Man. There are no right or wrong answers here; just think on it and make some notes.

Finally, you have access to a new Keeper reaction, **The Big Man**, once Layer One is unlocked and the stinger scene is narrated. This Keeper reaction is simply your permission slip to start having the Big Man show up in scenes with the Latchkeys. The Big Man's first actual appearance should be in the stinger scene, but after that, you can have him show up whenever it would be dramatic or interesting. Note: while it's highly unlikely, there's a possibility a Latchkey will mark The Wandering Monolith before you have a chance to properly introduce the Big Man. If that happens, just explain to them they can't seek out the Big Man until he has made contact with them first.

The Big Man in Layer One

In Layer One, the Big Man appears as he does in the stinger scene. He's taller than the tallest Latchkey, he's four feet wide at the shoulder, and he wears a creamy yellow suit, sun face bolo tie, and cowboy hat. He should have some sort of affectation or habit, like smoking cigarettes, playing with a lighter, or whistling a certain song. There's nothing obviously supernatural about him, apart from his size and ability to appear out of nowhere.

For Latchkeys who have marked The Wandering Monolith, the Big Man can be found anywhere in Deep Lake. His disposition is friendly, and he speaks to the Latchkey as if he's sharing a particularly good story or joke with them.

Quotes:

"Who am I? Well, I suppose I have gone by many names over the years, but you can call me the Wanderer. Because that's what I do. I wander. I observe. I remember. And I tell stories about the places I wander to, about the people I see. I'm going to tell a story about you someday, you can be sure of that. I wonder what kind of ending it will have?"

"This patch of desert right here, what people in this century refer to as Degoya County? It's an old, old place. Some might say it's the oldest place. It might even be older than the Sun..."

"I recently beheld a red moon. It was blood red, like a bullet hole in the sky. And then I looked all around me and I saw dead things in the earth, rising up to witness this bloody moon, or perhaps to worship it. And the veil between worlds-between different realities, between different dimensions, between the lands of the living and the dead-was as thin as I'd ever seen it. It was gossamer, it was mist... I could press my finger into it and feel its feverish yielding. But the red moon was neither cause nor symptom. It was an augur."

LAYER TWO: THE STRANGE HISTORY OF DEGOYA COUNTY

You have access to a new Keeper reaction when this layer unlocks: **Reveal the history of Degoya County.** Your campaign's lore will develop naturally through gameplay, but there are some key elements of the region's history that are now available to share. Keep an eye out for any opportunity to share this history. Perhaps the Latchkeys learn it while doing archival research or speaking with someone who has lived in Deep Lake their whole life; maybe they have a dream about it or learn it from the Big Man. You don't have to wait for a die roll to share this history—any dramatic or interesting moment in the story will do—but a 12+ on the Day/Night Move is a terrific place to put this stuff.

Layer Two also asks you to name a Side Character you'd like to see return during the TV Odyssey mystery, as well as to revise your theories about TV Odyssey and the Big Man. As before, there are no right or wrong answers; just think about it for a bit and write down your ideas.

The Big Man in Layer Two

The Big Man's physical appearance in Layer Two is similar to his appearance in Layer One, but with two differences: his supernatural nature is visible in some small way, and he is starting to show signs of decay. His supernatural nature is revealed in the following way (pick one):

- His limbs are overly long.
- His eyes glow a strange color at night.
- He appears a little to the left of where his voice is coming from.
- He's not quite touching the ground.
- He has too many fingers on one hand.
- Something else _____.

He is starting to show signs of decay in the following way (pick one or more):

- His skin is puffy and sagging.
- His eyes are pale with cataracts.
- His teeth are slimy and yellow.
- He's thinner than you remember.
- He's slightly translucent.
- Something else _____.

Quotes:

"How are those tapes going? Have you figured out what happened to that TV station yet?... You know, it's possible you're looking at those tapes in the wrong way. You think you're looking for clues about what happened in the past, but the Odyssey tapes are just as good at predicting the future. They're a little bit like tarot cards in that way: the characters on the tapes are icons... archetypes, if you will. Except if the tarot tells the story of humanity's journey to enlightenment, the tapes tell the story of humanity's inevitable regression. And don't you mistake it: humanity is always trying to return to that primal place, that ancient and evil state. The past is prologue and all that. Or put another way: let's rewind and not be kind."

"I fear the seams that hold our reality together are ready to burst. And many-mouthed horrors will spill forth from those tears in the cosmic fabric. But there are opportunities, as well... TV Odyssey will be closer than ever, or at least the doorway to it will be. First the dangers, then the doorway. Do you get me?"

"The deep desert is calling to me... the ancient places are being trod upon once more... the old things—the old hungers in the earth—are shaking off their slumber... I must go to them."

For Latchkeys who have marked The Wandering Monolith, the Big Man can only be found in the wilderness just outside town. His disposition is gloomy and sardonic.

LAYER THREE: THE GREAT HUNGERS

Layer Three represents a dramatic escalation of the campaign's horror elements. A group of entities called the Great Hungers begin appearing. Like the Big Man, the exact nature of the Great Hungers isn't defined—it's for you to decide what they are (if their nature ever gets revealed at all)—but one thing is certain: they are hunting the Latchkeys. The Great Hungers will attack the Latchkeys in Layer Four, during the Night of the Bone-Wolves, but for now they simply stalk from the shadows.

You have access to a new Keeper reaction, **Found Footage**, after the first Great Hunger is introduced via the Layer Three stinger scene. This reaction can only be used once, and only while in Layer Three. When you do this reaction, a Latchkey discovers a blank Odyssey tape; they can add it to Their Corner of

the House or give it to another Latchkey. The blank tape can be marked before a die roll to get an automatic 12+. The Latchkey then takes the Condition: Somebody's Watching Me. Thereafter, whenever a Latchkey with Somebody's Watching Me enters a new Location or scene, another player has to describe how one of the Great Hungers is also in the scene, lurking in the background, silently watching. Only Latchkeys with Somebody's Watching Me can be aware of the presence of the Great Hungers, and even then only as a vague feeling of being watched. Somebody's Watching Me can only be cleared after the Night of the Bone-Wolves.

As with previous layers, you will take time to revise your theories about the Big Man and TV Odyssey. Be sure to think about how the Great Hungers might fit in.

The Big Man in Layer Three

The Big Man now appears as he does in the stinger scene: gaunt, milky-eyed, and decaying. He is easily distracted, barely lucid, and rambles incoherently.

For Latchkeys who have marked The Wandering Monolith, the Big Man can only be found in the deep desert, miles from civilization. His disposition is that of a desperate, dying thing.

Quotes:

"In the old days they called me He Who Walks. They knew me everywhere I went, from the most magnificent walled city-states to the humblest pueblos. But where was I walking to? That's the question no one could ever answer. I only had the dimmest sense of it myself. My destination was set before me an epoch ago... and that's a lot of time to forget the details."

"I once visited a farm, out Missouri way. I was tired, and desperate—even more tired and desperate than I am right now—on the verge of death, as I recall. The family that lived there took me in, nursed me to health. They had the most beautiful children I'd ever seen: healthy, sun-kissed farm children. Each of those children—there were seven of them—told me stories, one by one, over the course of seven days and seven nights. They told me stories from the Bible, but not the stories you know from your King James. They told me stories that never made it out of the Bronze Age. They told me the truth of the so-called Good Book, and they whispered prophecy. The things they whispered to me are coming to pass, and there's nothing we can do to stop any of it."

"I am in that coal mine even now. How long have we been trapped down here? Will anyone come to rescue us? Or will they just leave us here, to die in the dark? Oh, how I want to gaze upon the Sun one last time!"

LAYER FOUR: THE NIGHT OF THE BONE-WOLVES

Layer Four is like a supernatural home invasion movie. The Latchkeys will prepare a defense of the house on Rodenbecker Street and then face the Great Hungers. If the Latchkeys choose not to defend Rodenbecker Street, have the Great Hungers attack them wherever they're at and treat the Night phase as if they had rolled a miss on the new Question.

You may be wondering what kinds of attacks and powers the Great Hungers have. Just come up with something that is fun and coherent with your story. Maybe their attacks are fairly mundane—punching, clawing, kicking—but vicious. Maybe they have telekinetic powers or cast spells. Mechanically-speaking, it's all just Night Moves, so don't get too bogged down in it.

Finally, you will make one more revision to your theory about TV Odyssey during Layer Four.

The Big Man in Layer Four

The Big Man appears as he does in the introduction to *The Night of the Bone-Wolves*: immense, god-like, and with a face that burns like a sun.

For Latchkeys who have marked The Wandering Monolith, the Big Man can only be found in dreams. His disposition is all-knowing and benevolent.

Quotes:

"I have reached the Garden, where the old ones play like children, and make war on each other like children do. It is the birthplace of All, but it is threatened by storm clouds forming in the distance. I will do my best to burn those clouds away, to keep the Garden a place of goodness and wonder and delight. For if I do not, the old ones will remember who they really are, and that would be a terrible calamity indeed."

"You are no longer the Fool—perhaps you never were. You are the High Priestess. Are you ready for your journey into the deep place?"

"I see everything you have been, everything you are, and everything you will become. And I am swollen with gladness because of it."



THE TV ODYSSEY MYSTERY

The best way to think about the TV Odyssey mystery is that it's a reward for getting this far in the campaign—it's the big payoff. Advice for writing the TV Odyssey mystery follows.

WRITING THE TV ODYSSEY MYSTERY

You're going to write the TV Odyssey mystery. It might seem intimidating at first, but as I said at the start of this chapter: you've got this. By the time you reach this point in the campaign, you will have so many story elements to draw on, and have so much experience with the mystery structure, writing the TV Odyssey mystery will be a snap.

Keep these things in mind:

You only have to write as much as you need to run the mystery. If you feel reasonably confident you can improvise descriptions of things in play, "writing the TV Odyssey mystery" might mean little more than jotting down an idea for how the mystery starts, noting the names of some characters and places, and writing a few Clues. Obviously, if you'd feel more comfortable writing in more detail, then do so, but trust that you are a better improviser than you might realize.

Focus on callbacks. The purpose of the TV Odyssey mystery is to tie a satisfying bow on the campaign, and the best way to do that is to have lots of callbacks to earlier parts of the story. Use characters and places from previous mysteries, and utilize all those notes you've been taking on the TV Odyssey sheet.

It's almost impossible to mess this up. The players are 100% in your corner—they want you to succeed, and so everything that happens in the TV Odyssey mystery will be the coolest thing ever no matter what you do, because that's what they're here to experience. Trust your instincts, trust your prep, and trust the play dynamic that has developed at the table over the course of the campaign.

Now let's get into the specific elements you need for your TV Odyssey mystery...

Preliminary Steps

You need to decide on three key details before you start writing:

What happened to TV Odyssey? Did it get teleported to another dimension? Does it exist in the realm of ghosts or dreams? Did it get swallowed by the maw of Hell? You've been pondering and revising your theory about TV Odyssey and the Big Man this entire time, and now is the time to say definitively what happened to TV Odyssey. You must also decide whether TV Odyssey has returned from wherever it was.

What major problem will occur if the Latchkeys don't step up to take care of it? Will a tear in the fabric of reality destroy Degoya County, or possibly the world? Will ghosts or demons start pouring out of an interdimensional gateway? Will the people of Degoya County be trapped in a nightmarish, neverending TV show? Whatever you decide, make sure it's *big*. It has to be the kind of trouble the Latchkeys can't ignore.

How will the Latchkeys learn what they have to do? Will a knowledgeable Side Character tell them? Will a shadowy government organization turn up and recruit them? Will they find out from the Big Man?

Presenting the Mystery

Decide how to present the mystery. Don't overthink it. Consider all the information in the preliminary steps, particularly how the Latchkeys will learn about the mystery, and then write that down. Make sure the Latchkeys know the truth of TV Odyssey and what will happen if they don't tackle the problem presented. Be sure to give them some leads to follow in the beginning—characters they can talk to and places they can poke around.

Question & Opportunity

Obviously, you'll need your own wording here, but at a basic level, the Question is, "How do we stop [the terrible thing] from happening?" The Opportunity should be along the lines of, "Resolve the mystery by [taking an action that prevents the terrible thing from coming to pass.]" The Complexity of the Question is always 6.

Side Characters

You'll need Side Characters. Eight or so is a good number. You can create brand-new characters, but feel free to use characters from your notes, characters from past mysteries, and recurring characters in and around Deep Lake.

Locations

Create four or five key Locations for the mystery. You can create new Locations or reuse Locations from previous mysteries. If the TV Odyssey station has returned from wherever it went, it should be at least one of the Locations (and possibly all of the Locations if the entire mystery takes place inside it). No matter what, each Location has the same Paint the Scene question: *In what way has this place been affected by the truth of TV Odyssey?*

Clues

Create ten Clues, from scratch or adapted from previous mysteries.



THE FOOL

**SESSION
ONE**

The following is a step-by-step guide to running your first session of *Public Access*. The times listed with some of the steps are estimates—don't fret if you're taking longer to complete each step. Text in *italics* is meant to be read aloud to the players.

Step One: Read the Materials

As the Keeper, you should read the rulebook in its entirety. Skim the other handouts so you have a basic familiarity with them. Importantly, you should decide which mystery you're going to start with and which Odyssey tape the Latchkeys will have at the start of the story. Consider watching an actual play; the author of this game has videos on his YouTube channel showing how the game works.

Step Two: Gather Play Materials

You will need:

- At least three six-sided dice (more is better).
- Index cards and a marker for Clues and name tents.
- A pencil for each participant.
- Enough copies of the character sheet for every player to have one.
- At least one reference sheet, but one per participant is better.
- At least one copy of the Latchkey moves sheet.
- Your chosen mystery sheet (we recommend starting with *The House on Escondido Street*).
- The TV Odyssey sheet.
- At least one Odyssey tape.

Step Three: Gather Participants

Public Access works best with one Keeper and three players. One Keeper and two players and one Keeper and four players also work well. Avoid playing *Public Access* with five or more players.

Step Four: Player and Keeper Introductions (2 min.)

Going around the table, each participant should state their name, their pronouns, and anything else the group might find interesting about them. You can skip this step if you're playing with a group of friends who know each other well.

Step Five: CATS (3 min.)

CATS is an acronym that stands for Concept, Aim, Tone, and Subject Matter. It is usually presented by the Keeper and helps establish some basic expectations for how the game is going to proceed. It's also a low-stakes way for the Keeper to get accustomed to being in the spotlight.

Read the following to the players:

Now I'm going to do CATS. CATS is an acronym that stands for Concept, Aim, Tone, and Subject Matter. The purpose of CATS is to establish some basic expectations for what this game is about and what we're going to be doing during this first session.

Concept: Public Access is a tabletop roleplaying game about a group of people in 2004—the Deep Lake Latchkeys—who find themselves investigating strange mysteries in and around the town of Deep Lake, New Mexico. In the '80s and early '90s, Deep Lake was the home of a notorious public access television station called TV Odyssey, the history and fate of which—the station literally disappeared—is the source of much speculation in certain corners of the internet. As the Latchkeys conduct their investigations in Deep Lake, they will become increasingly aware of the central role TV Odyssey plays in everything that's going on, and will have to face whatever terrible truth lies at the heart of the infamous station. Public Access takes inspiration from early internet horror stories, creepypasta tales, and urban legends. It's also inspired by the analog and found footage horror subgenres, synthwave and vaporwave music, and American pop culture from the '80s and '90s. The game's mechanics are based on Apocalypse World, Brindlewood Bay, and The Between. You don't need to know anything about those games in order to play.

Aim: The aim of the characters in the story is to investigate local mysteries in order to get closer to the truth of what happened to TV Odyssey. Our aim as players is to learn more about these characters' pasts, as well as to paint a vivid picture of our version of Deep Lake, New Mexico, a responsibility we all share. The aims for today's session are to create and introduce our characters, learn the basics of how the game works by playing it, and then having a debrief period at the end.

Tone: The tone of Public Access is nostalgic, weird, and terrifying. Everything should always feel just a little bit wrong, a little bit off. Levity and humor is totally acceptable, especially in the early parts of the game, but as the overall story progresses, things will get much weirder and much scarier.

Subject Matter: Cosmic horror, graphic violence, ritual sacrifice, sexism, sexual desire, childhood trauma, consumer culture, and other dark and sensitive topics can come up in this game. We'll talk about safety tools in just a moment, but in the interest of setting expectations right now, you should know that this game occasionally deals with dark and intense subject matter.

Step Six: Safety Tools (5 min.)

You can use whichever safety tools your group is most comfortable with. We recommend you use the Open Door Policy, the X-card, and Lines & Veils. You can Google each of those for more information (add "safety tools" and "TTRPG" to your query). The scripted portion of this step assumes you are using the three suggested tools.

No game is more important than the people playing it. We're going to paint a dark, unsettling portrait of Deep Lake, New Mexico, but we're going to do it in a way that respects everyone's boundaries of safety and consent. In order to do that, we'll be using three safety tools: the Open Door Policy, the X-card, and Lines & Veils.

The Open Door Policy is very simple: you can leave the game for any reason and you don't have to explain yourself. Just let us know you have to go; no one here will ask any questions about it.

At this point, you should point to the X-card.

The X-card is here in case something in the game makes you feel uncomfortable in an un-fun way. Just tap or hold up the X-card and we will stop play in order to change whatever just happened in the game. As the Keeper, I may ask for clarification on what is being X-carded, but I will never ask why. We'll resume play once the change is made.

Finally, we'll be using Lines & Veils. Lines are things that we are not going to have in the game, period. Veils are things that we're ok with being in the game but we prefer not to roleplay them, or we simply want to keep them offscreen. Importantly, even though I earlier listed a number of dark subject matters that come up in Public Access, you can still include one or more of those things as part of Lines & Veils. As I said before, no game is more important than the people playing it.

I will start by sharing my personal Lines & Veils right now. You can tell me your own Lines & Veils privately during a break and I will then convey them to the group anonymously when we're back together.

Here you should tell the group what your Lines & Veils are (or just give examples if you prefer to not share them publicly). The author of this game, for example, always lists "sexual assault" as a Line and "torture" as a Veil. Remind the group before your first break that they can share their Lines & Veils with you privately and that you will then convey them to the group anonymously.

Step Seven: Character Creation (15 min.)

Before we begin character creation, I want to share a few more details about the setting. The game takes place in and around the fictional town of Deep Lake, New Mexico. Deep Lake and surrounding Degoya County are in a remote part of the state. The town has fewer than 5,000 residents, but the eponymous lake attracts vacationers and seasonal hands in the summer, doubling the number of people around.

The player characters are a group of people in their early 20s who met on an internet forum and bonded over their shared history: they each spent part of their childhood in 1980s and early 1990s Deep Lake, they were each latchkey kids, and they were—and are—fascinated by TV Odyssey. They didn't know each other when they lived in Deep Lake, but they've found each other now, and under their new nickname, the Deep Lake Latchkeys, they intend to find out the true story of TV Odyssey.

The Latchkeys are united by something else, though they aren't yet aware of it: they each suffered a terrible trauma in their childhood. Sharing and exploring those traumas is something they will do together as they get more involved in the mysteries surrounding the town. You should avoid talking about these aspects of your Latchkey—both in and out of character—until prompted to do so by the game's rules.

Just before the game starts, the Latchkeys decide to meet in person: they have rented a house on Rodenbecker Street in Deep Lake, and are going to spend the summer there, getting to the bottom of what happened to TV Odyssey. They haven't had much luck figuring out what happened to TV Odyssey by the time the game starts, but they'll stumble onto some other mysteries in the town that will keep them occupied until then.

Give everyone a chance to briefly look over the character sheet and Latchkey moves sheet. They can begin filling out their character sheet whenever they're ready. When creating characters, players should avoid picking duplicate elements from the sheets.

The character creation steps are:

1. Pick a Name and Surname.
2. Pick a Style.
3. Pick three items from Takes You Back.
4. Add 1 to one of the starting Ability scores.
5. Mark two Dawn Questions.
6. Choose a Latchkey move.

Step Eight: Introduce Characters and Populate Your Corner of the House (10 min.)

Now that you've all made characters, let's introduce them. Going around the table, everyone please introduce your character by Name, Style, and the things that Take You Back. You can also tell us what your Latchkey move does. I'll remind you that you should avoid sharing key details about your character's past, particularly those elements explored in the part of the character sheet called The Key of the Child.

After everyone does this, continue with:

Now we're going to go around again and I'd like for you to tell us three pieces of information related to your character's young adulthood—where they are right now in their lives:

- *What they do for a living, if anything.*
- *What they want to do in the future, if anything.*
- *If they have a significant other back home: who is that person and what do they do?*

The rest of us are going to pay close attention because after you're done, each of us is going to say an item we think your character brought with them to Deep Lake. You can veto any idea you don't like, or ask for a revision. You'll write down each item in the Your Corner of the House section of your character sheet.

Step Nine: Break (10 min.)

Now that we've met the characters, we're ready to play! Let's take a ten-minute break; I'll introduce the first mystery when we return. Also: don't forget to find me and tell me your Lines & Veils!

Step Ten: Before We Begin... (3 min.)

Before we begin, let me tell you some new Lines & Veils.

Communicate any Lines & Veils that were told to you on break.

Also, I want to tell you that even though this is a game set in 2004—and makes lots of references to American pop culture of the '80s and '90s—we aren't going to dwell on historical accuracy. We'll do our best to represent the technology and culture of the various eras explored in this game, but we're going to get some things wrong every now and then, and that's ok. I'd also like to point out that, during the time periods we're talking about, people with marginalized identities would likely have been treated poorly in society. We're going to largely ignore that part of history, unless it's important to the development of a character or emotionally resonant in the story—and even then we'll always stay within the bounds of safety and consent, as previously discussed. As a general matter, in the world of Public Access, things like race, nationality, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and neurodivergence are not a social barrier.

Step Eleven: Present the Mystery (5 min.)

If there are no other questions, let's begin!

You all met on a small online forum called The Deep Lake Odyssey. The people who gather on this forum are interested in the mystery of a public access TV station in Deep Lake, New Mexico called TV Odyssey, which broadcast on cable channel 94. TV Odyssey operated from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, offering studio space to, and airing, a variety of local productions. The station literally—physically—disappeared in 1992. At the time, local officials said a fire burned the station down, but there was no evidence to support that. The station simply... vanished. Perhaps even more strange, the people of Deep Lake and surrounding Degoya County can't remember TV Odyssey—or, if they do, they aren't talking about it.

The only evidence TV Odyssey ever existed is the vague recollections of people on the forum, and the so-called Odyssey tapes. The Odyssey tapes are VHS recordings that supposedly contain episodes of the various shows that aired on Channel 94. The Odyssey tapes are recognizable by their distinctive purple clamshells, the paper inserts of which depict day-glo pyramids and torii gates. The Odyssey tapes also have physical properties that are unexplainable by science: the content of the tapes can only be viewed at night, and cannot be transferred to any other medium; attempting to watch one during the day or from an internet upload have all failed—the image just shows a blank, blue screen.

You got to know each other on the forum over the course of a few months, and decided to spend the summer in Deep Lake, looking into the mystery of TV Odyssey, and hoping to snag an Odyssey tape or two. You each lived in Deep Lake when you were kids, back in the late '80s and early '90s, though you didn't know each other at the time. You have vague recollections of TV Odyssey, and you hope that pooling your knowledge and resources together might help you get to the bottom of what happened. Worst case scenario: you spend a few months in a small tourist town with new friends.

You rented 26 Rodenbecker Street, a house in Deep Lake, and have been there for a few weeks, not making much progress on TV Odyssey. No one wants to talk, and you certainly haven't found any Odyssey tapes.

But all that changed this morning. Someone left an Odyssey tape on your doorstep. It's called [title of tape you selected]. You'll watch it in due time, maybe tonight, but there's something else: another mystery in the town of Deep Lake has found you...

Here you should read the Presenting the Mystery section of your selected mystery, as well as the Questions & Opportunities and special Key (if there is one).

Step Twelve: Regular Play (90 min.)

At this point you'll begin regular play following the guidelines and advice you learned earlier in the book. Start with the Day phase. Keep a few things in mind if this is your first time playing *Public Access*:

- Don't worry about getting things wrong. You're probably going to forget Conditions and Your Corner of the House the first time you play. It will take the players a session or two to master the Keys and Odyssey tapes. That's all fine; just take it slow and do your best. Focus on teaching the gameplay basics: when to use each move, how the dice work, what the Ability scores mean, advantage and disadvantage, and so forth.
- You might only finish the Day and Dusk phases. That's fine, and maybe even preferable since the Night phase is more challenging and can be handled better during Session Two after everyone's had some time to process things.
- Take a five minute break at some point.

Step Thirteen: Debrief (10 min.)

Have a short debrief period at the end of the session. You can use any debrief technique you wish; we prefer a technique called Stars & Wishes because it is positive and uplifting.

Let's do a debrief technique called Stars & Wishes. Stars are things you enjoyed about the session: characters, scenes, bits of description, something from the gameplay—anything you liked can be a Star. Wishes are things you hope to see next time: exploring a part of the game we didn't get to today, following up with a character about something, having a scene with a certain character, and so forth.

Step Fourteen: The Big Man Scene (if applicable; 2 min.)

This is when you will narrate the end of session scene from the TV Odyssey sheet if you unlocked Layer One of the campaign.

Step Fifteen: Homework (1 min.)

Encourage the players to review their character sheet before the next session. In particular, they should read through the section called The Key of the Child and think about what that means for their character. They should also start thinking about the Clues they have gathered and how it might help answer a Question, if the starting mystery is still unresolved.

Session Two and Onward...

Begin the session by doing a light recap of the active mysteries: remind the players about any Clues uncovered and where things stand. Continue regular play from there. Save ten minutes at the end for a debrief.



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