

Murderous Character Ballad

A game for three or more people who love Unknown Armies, best played while drinking around a campfire after midnight. Also, you should already know shit like “scene,” “PC,” “NPC,” etc.

Very briefly and irreverently designed by Ryan Macklin, edited by Michael Daugherty. Get a fork.

Know Your Setting

To get started, the players should talk briefly about what interests or excites you about the Unknown Armies setting. You could, of course, play in another setting, if you're a fucking wuss and want to play it safe.

Understand Your Characters

Each person should answer the following question, the **Murder Question**, out loud to the group:

"What is it about the person on your left that makes him worth killing?"

When someone answers this question about your character, you must take that to heart as an objective truth in the world – people think your character is worth killing for that reason. Now, the reason itself might not actually be *true*, but tell that to an enforcer with a gun to your dome.

Play the Damned Game, Already

Once everyone has had the **Murder Question** answered for them, you'll play the game by taking turns describing scenes involving the immediate peril of another player's character as described in **Frame a Scene**.

The Focused Player will **Play the Scene Out**, along with others who come in to play their PCs or NPCs, until someone **Does Something Worth Killing Over**. If the scene seems to go on for an unacceptably long time without anyone **Doing Something Worth Killing Over**, the people not playing in that scene can **Make Demands When People Won't Shut Up**.

Frame a Scene

If this is the first scene of the game, the person who is clearly the boldest should step up and start. Otherwise, the person who just had a scene focused on them should frame a scene – though, they may foolishly give up this to anyone who is bold enough to speak up.

When Framing a Scene, tell the group the following details:

- *Who is this scene focused on?* It must be a living player-character, and cannot be yours. You frame someone else's peril, not your own.
- *Where does the scene take place?* Describe, in just a few words, the location. The players in the scene will fill in the details.
- *When does the scene take place?* Use a vague time of day or time relative to a prior scene (i.e. sometime before or after that scene), not concrete time.
- *How is the Focused Character in immediate peril?* **This is crucial!** Tell everyone about the situation and/or characters (player-characters or NPCs) that are threatening the Focused Character.
- *Are there other characters in the scene?* There should always be at least one other character, even if he is not directly involved in the Immediate Peril of the Focused Character.
- *Assign players to the characters you mentioned.* PCs are always played by their players. NPCs are given to those without PCs in the scene.

Once the scene has been framed, say **"Go!"**

Play a Scene Out

Once the scene framer has said **"Go!"**, players who have been assigned characters immediately spring into action by describing the dialogue between characters. For at least the first minute of playing the scene, no one should describe any significant actions. Certainly, no one should be **Doing Something Worth Killing Over**. Give it a moment for the scene to heat up, and then bring the hurt.

After the scene has been set and the initial dialogue has begun to reveal what the scene is really about, continue dialogue and describe your actions.

Dialogue or actions cannot violate the spirit of the game, whatever the fuck that means to you people. If you're playing a street-level game and start throwing major magick around like its candy, other players can call bullshit on you. If you need rules for "call bullshit," there's nothing I can do to help you.

Play the scene until someone **Does Something Worth Killing Over** or feels compelled to **Make Demands When People Won't Shut Up**.

Do Something Worth Killing Over

Should someone wants to stop an action from happening, he says "**No you don't, asshole!**" and puts his fist in the air. If this happens, the player describing the action has two options:

- *Fuck Off*: Say, "**You're right, I don't.**" The person who challenged you then gets to tell you how they stopped what you tried to do.
- *Murder*: Say, "**We'll see,**" and put *your* fist in the air.

If you choose to Fuck Off, the action you were just describing doesn't count as **Doing Something Worth Killing Over**. Continue **Playing the Scene**.

If you choose to Murder, then both sides do rock-paper-scissors. Three things might happen:

- *The Challenger wins*: He describes how he stops the Challenged's action, to the point where the Challenged is killed. This could be intentional or accidental, but the Challenged character is definitely fucking dead.
- *The Challenger loses*: The Challenged describes how he completes his action, to the point where the Challenger is killed. Once again, the loser dies, whether it's an accident or a more direct form of killing.
- *Tie*: The scene immediately stops. There is no resolution. The Focused Character's Player frames the next scene **right now**.

If the Focused Character wins a Challenge, he may choose to wrap the scene with the loser's death or Let It Ride, continuing the scene. Otherwise, the scene must definitely end after the winner's narration of events related to the Challenge.

Dead Player Characters and Their Players

Being dead is fucked up, isn't it? Players with dead PCs may not have their PC involved in scenes, except as a corpse they have no control over. But, it's not all just bowel-voiding and decay! Players with dead PCs are the only ones who may play unnatural entities – demons, monsters, etc.

You may insert yourself into any scene as an unnatural entity, at any point you choose. The world gets more fucked up as PCs die.

Make Demands When People Won't Shut Up

Sometimes people just keep playing without getting to the freakin' murder! If the scene seems to go on too long, any player not currently in the scene may **Demand Consequences of Inaction** (if he's in the scene, he damn well better just **Do Something Worth Killing Over**). If the group consensus agrees that the scene has gone on too long, then the Focused Player has a choice to make:

- Immediately **Do Something Worth Killing Over**. The Challenged may not choose to Fuck Off.
- Accept the **Consequences of Inaction**.

If the Focused Player accepts the **Consequences of Inaction**, then the Demanding Player narrates how the scene closes. The Demanding Player must include, either at the end of the scene or as a quick interstitial scene, the consequences the Focused Player's character has to deal with. No one may challenge this – if the Focused Player didn't want it to go down that way, he should have **Done Something Worth Killing Over**.

End the Game

The game ends when the players as a group feel like a particular scene is a good ending. Otherwise the game ends when one PC is left standing atop a pile of smoking corpses.