



iMPACT!

Collaborative Storytelling

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...with thanks to Laura

For all you have done,
and have encouraged in me.

iMPACT!

Collaborative Storytelling

Why iMPACT! ?.....	vi
What is Collaborative Storytelling?.....	2
What iMPACT! is and isn't.....	5
Where to start?	6
Troupe Style	6
Hero Style	7
How to play iMPACT!.....	8
The Start	8
Characters	9
The Hero	12
The Story.....	14
Theme	15
Location	15
Plot.....	16
Cast.....	17

Twist	19
Resolution	19
The iMPACT!	21
Starting Tokens	22
Earning Tokens	23
Putting it all Together	24
Taking Control of the Story	24
Character Roles	27
Character vs. Character	29
Narration.....	30
The Cost of Failure (and Success)...	32
Climax Resolution	35
Sample Scene	37



Why iMPACT! ?

I've been playing roleplaying games since they were invented, and no hobby has kept my undivided attention better throughout the years. I'm drawn to it in ways I cannot explain and have shared in some wonderful experiences that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. But there is one question I cannot help but ask myself - why? What is it about roleplaying that has occupied my brain in such a way that I cannot shake it? Is it the gathering of friends to spend a day or evening together? Is it the long list of unique characters I have created? Is it the countless adventures I have been a part of? After more than 40 years of roleplaying I have come to realize what it is about the hobby that has fueled my brain and filled my heart. It is the story.

Some say story is something we have always been drawn to, from the earliest days when we would gather around the fire under a starry sky, to hear our elders convey important histories and lessons, and to pass on from generation to generation the teachings of those who've

come before us. We are drawn to things that foster our imagination, and nothing paints more vivid images in our minds than fresh and compelling stories.

So it is with that in mind that I present to you, iMPACT!. Gather your friends, create your characters, and embark upon a journey of story that might be a bit unlike anything you have ever done before.

What is Collaborative Storytelling?

Imagine telling a story, where those you have gathered around you all have the means to effect it. This is collaborative storytelling. It's part narrative, part creative process, part thinking on your feet, part imagination, part redirection, part exploration, and part interjection - with a dash of trust. iMPACT! is where narration and roleplaying collide. There are no stats, no numbers, no charts - just story. It is a game where the person telling the story (who we will call the narrator) weaves a tale, moment by moment, before their group of players (called, well, players). Each player takes on the role of a character

(called player characters, or PC's), whereas the narrator may play the role of several other characters the player characters may meet along the way (called non-player characters, or NPC's). As the narrator continues with their story, the players can impact that story. When a player impacts the story, they take brief control of the story's plot - pointing it in a new direction based upon how their character impacts where the story was heading. For example, the narrator may explain how one of the PC's lost their mayoral election in the story. Wanting to make an iMPACT!, the player of that character chooses to intervene, changing how it initially looked as though their character was losing in the race, but late-night counts of the votes resulted in them winning the election in the end. This is collaborative storytelling, where the narrator tells the group a story, but at any various point in that story, the players will be changing, editing, adding to, or removing from it. It promotes creativity, imagination, and certainly keeps the narrator on their toes. This is iMPACT!.



What iMPACT! is

...and isn't

More than anything, iMPACT! is a way to tell stories that elicits ideas and can quickly turn the simple into the elaborate. It is a light and easy way to both roleplay and story tell. It is very easy to explain and to play, making for a wonderful introduction to roleplaying. It can also prompt active listening, stir the imagination, and inspire plot development. Stories aren't left to the fate of a die roll, there are no elaborate mechanics, no character sheets to change numbers on, and no points to improve them with. Characters are who they are, and any development of them will happen in real time during the game. iMPACT! is also a game that can be both fun and relaxing, or incredibly mentally taxing - depending on just how much effort you want to put into it. iMPACT! is truly a game where the more effort you put into it, the more you will get out of it.

Where to start?

There are two ways to play the iMPACT! Game: troupe style and hero style. Each one has its pros and cons, and depending on the story you want to tell, one might be easier or better than the other. Below is a summation of the two, and some examples of why one might choose one over the other for their story.

Troupe Style

Troupe style games are more along the lines of what we typically think of when we think about roleplaying games. Every player plays a character that represents one of the main characters of the story. They might all be members of an elite special operations team, a group of explorers on the same spaceship, or a team of archaeologists all unearthing a new find. They could have known each other for years, since they were children, or all brought together under mysterious circumstances. The point is this: these characters all carry equal weight in the story. In the troupe style game, everyone will be (hopefully) working together in the story, helping make decisions, and

directing the stories in ways that benefit them collectively.

Hero Style

This is a slightly more particular style of play, but something that can make for a more directed story. In the hero style, one player plays the hero character. Every other player at the table plays a member of the supporting cast associated with that hero. The hero could be anyone; a CIA agent flown in to pick up the trail from another agent that has gone missing, a young boy trying to convince the small town where he lives that something monstrous lives in the woods, or a man from the distant future who has come back in time to save the world. The supporting characters are secondary to the story but cannot only impact the story for their character's benefits but also for the hero's. The point is this: the story will always be about the hero character. In the hero style game, everyone will be helping the hero on their journey, even at the sacrifice of themselves.

How to play iMPACT!

The Start

First and foremost, the narrator needs an idea for a story. They don't have to have a complete story. They'll need a setting, an explanation of the world should it be different from our own, and perhaps a cast of characters they'll be introducing to the story. The narrator needs to provide their players with the information they need to know what kind of story their characters will be setting out on, so they can create compelling characters that will fit. It is highly suggested the narrator provide the players with as much of a framework for their characters as they feel important for the story. Something like, "the story will begin at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, where all the characters are attending as participants. They should all be relatively active people with curious minds who will get tangled up in the apocalypse that will unfold during their meeting." The more information about the world you can give everyone at the start of the story, the more the players can create characters who will immediately fit right in

from the start. If you're using the hero style, have the player playing the hero character imagine their character first. The other players should ask them questions, perhaps about the people around their character, seeing what types of supporting characters might be a good fit for them to play alongside the hero.

Characters

Although there are no character sheets to speak of, it is highly recommended that every player writes down some key characteristics about their character; notes about who they are, their immediate history, the people they know, etc. Once the story gets underway it will be a big asset to have on hand, to be able to just look up a name that was dropped perhaps only once before, to know where that character might get tied into the story later. Additionally, players might have more than one character, this could be true in the troupe style game when flashing back or forward in history - say to previous ancestors, or descendants of the characters. It might also be true when running parallel stories with two different groups. In the hero style, it could be true

for the hero to have many connections, putting together teams of specialized individuals for specific capers they set out upon throughout the story.

These notes don't need to be specific at all, and in many ways might be more beneficial if they are more general. Consider what the character does for a living, and how they got there. What are their hobbies and interests? What are their achievements? Do they have a family? Do they speak any other languages, or hold a particular faith? What motivates them?

You may just have in mind that your character is a fireman, recently earning a place at a local station after graduating from the academy. He played sports in school, is between girlfriends, and has a very proud mother. That may be plenty, and leaves room for aspects of the character that might be discovered or taken up during the story. What matters is that the narrator has the basic idea of what your character is, and what his role or archetype is. This will allow them to better understand what your character can do. For example, a fireman would have a



far easier time applying first aid to an injured bystander than a restaurateur. Conveying who your character is will allow for the narrator to better understand his part in the story.

The Hero

Should you decide to play the hero style of iMPACT!, one of the players will be creating and playing the role of the main character. This is the character the story is going to revolve around, with the other players playing supporting roles for the hero throughout the story. This isn't to say that the other characters are in any way insignificant, just that the crux of the story is going to focus on the hero character. In fact, in many ways, this frees the other players to have more interesting characters as they don't necessarily have to be like the hero character. They might not even see eye to eye with the hero.

The narrator should work with the player creating the hero, giving the player a framework within which they should make their character better connect to the story, and to work alongside the player to better understand the character they are imagining. The narrator can lay out any

NPC's that they'd like to connect to the hero, when and how they met, and what those relationships are today. They can also lay out some timelines as to key events to the hero's life that better tie them to the story.

The player of the hero should come up with as much of a background as they can imagine, offering as many hooks to the narrator as they can. These can be things such as unrequited love, potential enemies or rivalries, ambitions, motivations, etc. The more "unfinished business" the hero has, the more potential material the narrator has on hand to better tie characters to the story. Of course, it is possible through the course of play that any additional ideas for potential character background can be worked into the story.

The other players will then need to figure out their connection with the main character, how they met, or if they were merely selected from a pool of potential candidates for whatever escapade the hero is setting out on. For example, if the main character is a great safari hunter, perhaps the other characters are all guides, porters, and hired hands setting

out on a great hunt for dangerous game. The supporting characters might also be far more connected to the hero too, if for example they were all friends growing up in school, now reunited at one of their funerals. Each character will need to figure out their relationship to the main character.

The Story

It is the narrator's job to come up with the story they'd like to tell. This isn't to say that the ideas they have will all come to fruition. Through the course of roleplaying, the story could take on any number of twists and turns. The narrator's job is to present options, let the characters make decisions, and then explain the results and consequences of those decisions in a story format.

Things to consider when putting together the story together might include:

- A theme
- A location
- A general plot
- A cast of characters (NPC's)
- A twist
- A general idea of a resolution

Theme

This is the general feel you're aiming for in the story. Themes might be simple, like the theme of struggle. You just want things to constantly seem difficult for the characters, that they never get a rest, and that just when all looks lost, they manage to pull out only to fall into the next mess. Themes might be more nonspecific, like the theme of deliberation, where nothing is an easy decision, and every choice comes with consequences. Perhaps the story is a game about weighing lesser evils, and living with the choices you make. Having a theme helps guide the story, helps give your players a sense of the substance of the story, and can help your story make an impact on the players and their characters.

Location

This should not only be the place on the map where your story takes place, but the time and reality as well. Your story might take place in a fantastic world, or at a specific place and time in history. It will lend a feel to the game and should be mentioned often to keep your players' minds living in the same environments you are imagining for them. Location includes

the sights and sounds, the smells, and the feel, including everything from a sense of safety to a sense of hope.

Plot

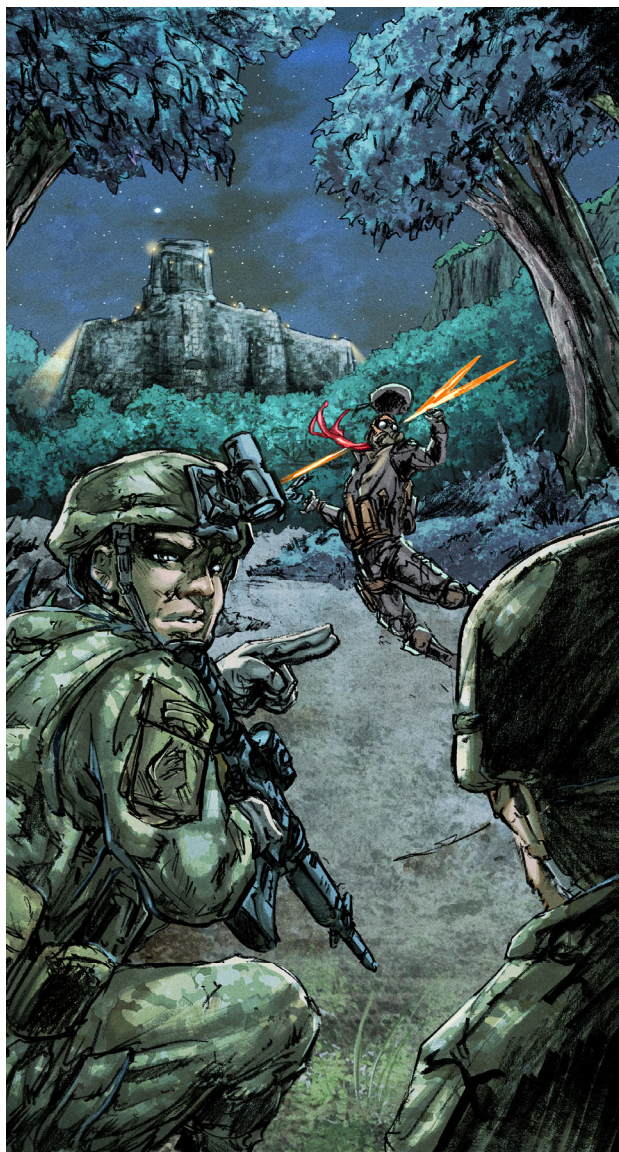
Many have said there are only a set number of plots, but often stories are combinations of more than one. Some of the basic plots include overcoming a threat, acquisition, the quest, the quest and back again, comedy, tragedy, and transformation or rebirth. When putting a plot together, you can start at the end or the beginning - but both will be important.

In the beginning, you'll need to know how the characters come together, for what reason, and what big decision point they are going to have to face. It might be that they're handed several dossiers of strange events all over the globe they need to go investigate, or it could be a meteor landing in their backyard emanating a strange gas that's turning everyone into monsters. The beginning of the story gets the characters together, gives them an understanding of their location and environment, and then presents them with the "so what are you going to do now" predicament.

In the end, you're imagining what the bad guy is. Is it an evil corporation, the leader of the alien army, or someone the characters know and love? You need to imagine how they come to learn who the antagonist is, what the scope of the problem they're facing is, and how they might go about dealing with it. Having an idea of a way or two the players can overcome it will make it easier for you to point them to one of those possibilities through the course of the story.

Cast

Think of everyone you can imagine that might be involved in the story. Give them a name, a vocation, and a note or two about their personality. Everyone the characters are going to hear from at the start of the game should be fleshed out in the narrator's mind. From there, draft up every other NPC you can imagine the characters meeting. Then, just to be safe, have a list of male and female names at your disposal you can draw from when you need to make up an NPC on the spot. If needed, feel free to draft a relationship tree to better remind yourself as to who knows who - just to help you keep



everything straight in your mind as you go through the story.

Twist

Though a story might not need a twist, it can certainly help to enhance the story. Twists can be simple or elaborate, discovered early or late. Stories can even have more than one. The easiest way to imagine a twist to a story is to ask yourself at several points throughout the story: what would I expect to happen? Once you know what the expectation is, you can then think of ways to twist that - to do anything, or even the opposite, of what expectations might be. A simple twist might be that the person who hired you has been the bad guy all along. An elaborate twist might be that although the person you've just caught is a double agent, they have been trying to become a triple agent if their betters will trust and accept them. A twist is simply an effort to put a part of the story on its ear to surprise and intrigue your players.

Resolution

Sooner or later the story comes to a head. This is the point where the characters have learned what is

happening, figured out where they can make a stand against whatever forces are working against them, and attempt to reach a favorable outcome. It could be an epic fight scene, delivering a casket to a soul-crushed mother, or getting all parties at the negotiation table to work out a resolution. Not only should you have an idea of what the climactic scene might be, but you'll need to consider several ways in which the characters might overcome it. The more you've imagined, the easier it will be to play out the course of the scene.

But it may not end there. In fact, the end might just be the beginning for the next chapter. Consider the consequences of the character's decisions, where they are, and how they might be getting back home (or to safety). Are their betters pleased with the outcome? What repercussions to their actions might there be to their reputation, their friends, or their country? Are there still loose ends to deal with? Or was this all a set up from the beginning? Maybe there's more story to tell, which might bring you right back to the beginning again.

The iMPACT!

What makes iMPACT! a collaborative storytelling game are iMPACT! tokens. As for the tokens themselves, anything can be used: coins, counters, dice, M&M's (if they don't get eaten along the way). So long as everyone at the table knows what is going to be used, you're set. The tokens represent an opportunity for the person possessing it to impact the story. Throughout the story the narrator is going to present you with options or decision points. The choices your character makes may have consequences, and from time to time, those consequences might lead to outcomes you might not be happy with. This is where the iMPACT! token comes in.

At any time in the story, any player can play an iMPACT! token. In doing so, the player is then allowed to interject with their own ideas as to the direction the story takes. Usually, this happens when the narrator is explaining something that either negatively affects one of the characters, negatively affects the players plan for the scene, or that one of the players themselves has imagined a better

turn for the story and is choosing to interject it.

Typically, one token is played at a time, but this isn't to say that multiple tokens can't be played to either interject numerous story elements at a time, or to ensure that a very beneficial outcome is had. This is completely up to you and your group as to how you want to deal with it, but feel free to give the players an opportunity to burn up all their tokens if it means that much to them.

Starting Tokens

How many tokens the players start with depends upon the kind of game you're playing, and how long your gaming session might be. First, let's address the kind of game you're running. If you're playing Troupe Style, start everyone with two iMPACT! tokens. If you're playing Hero Style, start the hero with three iMPACT! tokens and the remaining characters with one iMPACT! token each. Second, those numbers of tokens are based upon sessions that run about 3 hours. If your session runs longer than that, you may want to increase those numbers accordingly. This will also be contingent

upon how often the narrator presents the characters with choices and obstacles with serious consequences. The more of those introduced, the more likely players are going to want tokens to deal with it. After a session or two you should be able to dial in just how many tokens seem appropriate for your story and the playstyle of your group.

Earning Tokens

There are several ways the players earn tokens through the course of the story. The easiest way is to simply refresh their pool of tokens with each new session. Whatever they started with the session before they start again with for each subsequent session. The next option is for players to earn tokens through the course of compelling or heroic roleplaying. The narrator can award tokens to players and their characters for each great idea or moment their character has in the game. Finally, for the Hero Style of play, at the end of each session, each non-hero token remaining gets handed to the hero character's player. The hero then has use of those tokens for the next session, with each of the supporting characters getting one new token at the start of the next

session. The narrator may decide to do a bit of all the above, doing whatever works best for the game and story.

Putting it all Together

In its simplest form, iMPACT! is played with the narrator starting the story, presenting the players with decisions and obstacles their characters need to face, then telling them how their decisions play out. Then, through the course of the story, as players don't want certain outcomes to happen (or have great ideas as to new directions the story could head), they'll play their iMPACT! tokens to take brief control of the story.

Taking Control of the Story

At some point in the story the players are going to intervene. Perhaps it was when they decided to cross the rickety bridge and the narrator explained how the old boards broke beneath them. Maybe it was when they thought their meat-headed bodybuilder could just charm the secretary gatekeeping the CEO's office when the narrator pointed out she just laughs at him and calls security. There will



come moments when the players are attempting things, and the narrator has decided this is outside their character's means.

When a player plays an iMPACT! token, they'll chime in and take brief control of the story. This might be to overrule a simple decision the narrator has made; like their character losing a fight to a major henchman of the bad guy. They might simply explain how their character, doesn't lose, but in fact wins the fight, knocking out the henchman so they can interrogate them later. It might be to change the mind of a hostile NPC who isn't interested in helping the characters. The player might play their iMPACT! token and explain how this NPC and their character share a mutual friend and use that to better convince the NPC that they cannot only be trusted but be helped because they share this acquaintance.

Sometimes the player might have a completely different idea. Maybe all along they've said that they don't trust Mr. Henderson who's hired them. A player might play an iMPACT! token at some point connecting an interesting collection

of bank records they've found to Mr. Henderson, proving that he's been in with the bad guys all along.

Players are a creative lot and can reshape and redirect the story throughout the game, but there are limits. Playing an iMPACT! token doesn't give the player the ability to back the story up any further than the scene they're in to change any important details. It also doesn't allow the player to tell the direction the story takes that goes beyond the scene they're currently in. As a rule of thumb, players can only affect the things going on in the scene they're currently in. However, it is always left to the narrator's discretion as to how tokens are used, and how willing they are to let the player's idea play out fully.

Character Roles

Knowing the limitations and capabilities of the characters are the tools the narrator will use to decide when and where characters struggle. The narrator should have an idea of the characters in their game, such that they are comfortable with the skills and experiences they've had that will contribute to the story overall. When

outside these capabilities, the narrator is then well within their means to explain how things don't go the character's way.

For example, the players decide their characters are going to break into Old Man Leary's house while he's out walking his dog, and one character (Larry) has been left outside on watch. Through the course of the story, there comes some loud noises from inside the house, and Larry gets distracted by them enough to miss the approach of the Old Man. Larry has been described as a retired accountant, a little beyond his years, and was left outside so he didn't get hurt or lost inside the house. The narrator has decided that Larry has no applicable skills to be worthwhile on watch and has thus missed the approach of Old Man Leary once distracted by the noises inside the house. At this point the player playing Larry can opt to play an iMPACT! token, taking control of the story briefly to explain that just because Larry is old, doesn't mean he's abandoned the single responsibility he's been given outside the house. Thus turns his attention back to the streets and sees the approach of Old Man Leary.

Character roles, occupations, interests, etc. give the narrator the tools he needs to make decisions during the story. Deciding Chuck, the retired Navy Seal, jumps out of bed when his house is broken into and shoots one of the burglars before the other has run off is completely within reason. Deciding Larry, the retired accountant, gets robbed blind while he sleeps through the night is also within reason.

Should the player feel strongly that one of his character's capabilities has been overlooked in the scene, mention it. Narrators aren't guaranteed to have flawless memories. However, narrator's decisions are final, and just because a character seems to have struggled in a scene doesn't mean it isn't without reason that won't be revealed later.

Character vs. Character

Though less likely in the Hero Style of play, the Troupe Style can lead to moments where characters are contesting with other characters at given moments within the story. Such instances might be one character attempting to convince another

of their point of view, squaring off in an arm-wrestling match, or perhaps even going toe to toe in a physical altercation. In such instances, any player that spends an iMPACT! token will gain control of the story to decide how this contest between characters plays out. However, if both or neither of the players have iMPACT! tokens to play, resolution is left up to the discretion of the narrator.

Narration

So, you have your story, your players and their characters, and the tokens distributed. Now it's time to get storytelling. Begin by explaining where the characters are, if they're together or not, and under what circumstances they're coming together. From there you explain what happens, which NPC's are there, and the information or questions they offer up. Ultimately, you lead the players and their characters to their first decision or obstacle. Decisions are something the players will roleplay through discussion with their characters and the NPC's. Obstacles are things that the players will plan to deal with (even if spontaneously) and confront or address

collectively or individually. It is at that time the narrator looks at the characters and their capabilities, their circumstances, and the means at their disposal to decide whether this is something they can overcome or not. A group of travelers in a foreign land may have no means to communicate with the locals, and as such their needs and desires might never be met unless they can figure out a way to overcome the language barrier. However, that same group of travelers, having established that they have a friend who is a local resident and bilingual, might overcome that challenge with a single phone call. As the narrator, you would immediately know whether to tell the players that their characters are successful in their endeavor based upon how capable they are in executing their plans or ideas to overcome the obstacle.

When narrating a failure to overcome an obstacle or challenge, it is important to keep it within context of both the story and the character's limitations. In the above example where a group of travelers are attempting to overcome a language barrier, you might simply narrate that none of the locals seem able to understand what

it is the characters are asking of them. In a circumstance where that same group of travelers is beset upon by a group of kidnapers, the consequences of none of them being physically capable or skilled to fend off an attacker might be that they're all nabbed and tossed into the back of a van.

The object of narrating the story is to just keep the story going. Be mindful of the character's plans and means, but in those instances where they fall short, simply explain to them how they fell short and what the consequences are when they do. Remember that failure is always an option, and regardless of the character's success, failure doesn't mean there isn't an alternative, or that their consequences can't further the story itself.

The Cost of Failure (and Success)

Though the narrator will know how many iMPACT! tokens remain in player hands, they should always be mindful of what failure means for both the story and the characters involved. For example, having decided that a character or characters are incapable of successfully doing whatever they might be attempting, it is solely up to



the narrator to describe their failure. Failure can come in many forms, it can mean that although they think they can accomplish whatever they're attempting, they've realized they don't have enough time to complete it. It could mean a setback in the story, where the characters are back to zero having to formulate new plans. It could mean the bad guy gets away, or that the characters end up getting captured (which is always a great way for the characters to learn more about the antagonists and their motivations).

Likewise, players can spend iMPACT! tokens to overcome a scene where you were hoping the antagonists or obstacles would prove insurmountable. A good example of this is when individually (or even collectively) iMPACT! tokens are used to foil the antagonists' plans. This can put the narrator in a position where a key element of the story has just been crushed by a token or two. Though there is always the possibility of there being another antagonist or obstacle down the road, sometimes coming up with those story elements on the fly is difficult. This can be overcome by a cellphone ringing in the antagonist's pocket with a voice on the

other end asking, "Is it done?" This introduces a whole new player in the story, who the antagonist was working on behalf of. An NPC can be involved, appearing, calling out, or ringing the character's phones. They can be new or familiar, there to add another element to the story or to attempt betrayal. The obstacle the characters overcame isn't the last, their goal has moved, or the environment has complicated things (fog, blizzard, driving rain, etc.). As a narrator, you're going to have to think on your feet. It's always best to be prepared, understanding that anything you throw at the players can be overcome with creativity or iMPACT! tokens.

Climax Resolution

When you finally reach the apex of the story, it is possible players may have enough iMPACT! tokens to simply resolve the climactic moment by taking control of the story themselves. Likewise, it is also possible the players can get to the most dramatic moments and have no tokens left. In both instances it's worth being mindful of how you can deal with those circumstances in the interest of making a compelling outcome for the story.

When the players have too many tokens left, consider breaking down the scene into multiple steps. As an example, we're going to say that the climactic moment of this story is the characters needing to disarm a bomb. Players could just play an iMPACT! token and say they disarm the bomb, and the narrator would like a little more drama than that, so they break down the scene into steps. Perhaps getting to the bomb is a step, it's in a harsh environment, on the back of a moving truck, in a room with security protocols that have automated defenses. Once that is overcome, perhaps accessing the controls of the bomb is another step. Characters might have to use skills, tools, or creativity to get into the controls without risking setting the bomb off. Then, after both of those steps, the characters are faced with cutting the red wire with white stripes, not the white wire with the red stripes. Breaking down the dramatic scene into steps can easily put the players into situations where their available tokens are all put to good use.

However, when players have no tokens remaining, narrators are left with two

options. The first option (and often the most rewarding) is player creativity. Just because they don't have tokens doesn't mean they can't put their heads together and utilize the inherent assets their characters possess. Narrators can even nudge the players through the scene if necessary, pointing out to the appropriate character that they notice that "there is a thing over there that looks like you might be able to make use of." The second option is this isn't the end. The bad guy will get away, the characters will be overcome and wake up tied to a chair in some foreign location, or the computer virus gets introduced into the national banking system. The characters are just going to have to press on, deal with the fallout, and become the heroes and saviors at a later point. The story can always continue.

Sample Scene

Aaron, Beth, and Chris are playing characters who are all coworkers at a burgeoning IT company. They are playing a Troupe Style game, with everyone playing an equal role in the story. It has been made clear to each of them that the story is going to be one about death, loss, regret, and worlds beyond this one.

The narrator explains how the three of them carpool to work every morning and describes them heading into the office on President's Day. The narrator mentions how the traffic is light that morning, due to it being a holiday, even though the three of them don't have the day off. He explains how Beth has a big presentation to do first thing in the morning, and Chris is to meet with HR in the afternoon for his annual review. The three players all roleplay a bit of interaction before the narrator explains how they carry on, even poking fun at one another just enough to get the group of them laughing uncontrollably. Then they explain the oncoming truck.

At this point the players are completely aghast at what the narrator might be implying, but the story continues. The narrator then explains the haze, the oddity of what the characters are experiencing, and how they realize they are all three standing together staring at Aaron's wrecked SUV. After answering several questions from the players, the story continues. The three characters notice something more, a bright light forming behind them. In front of them, people

around the crash are getting out of their vehicles to check on those in the wrecked SUV, they're calling the paramedics and police, and none of them seem to react to the characters standing in the middle of the street. While they're still reeling from what has taken place, the narrator then explains something more. In the distance, in this strange parallel world in which they now find themselves, they can see a darkness encroaching. Then, as though this wasn't enough, there is a voice that rings out clear in each of the character's minds, "This way!" Appearing on the opposite side of the darkness is someone Chris' character seems to notice - a friend of his he lost years ago to suicide.

Presented with some choices, the players discuss whether to run towards the light, towards Chris' friend, or to stay where they are. Asking questions of the scene, the narrator explains how the light seems too far off for them to reach before the darkness reaches them, and the players decide their characters run for Chris' friend. The narrator then continues, explaining how moving seems to be slow and lethargic in this world, and despite



their best efforts, they can't outpace the darkness.

Beth's character then decides to play an iMPACT! token, feeling that the encroaching darkness is a bad thing, takes control of the story briefly to explain how Beth's leadership talents prompt her to push her companions beyond their physical limitations, both getting them to Chris' departed friend, and somewhere safe from the oncoming darkness. The narrator nods and continues, explaining how Beth's panicked encouragement is more than enough to get everyone into another gear, and reaching Chris' friend, are then somehow led through the doors of a closed trailer hooked to an eighteen-wheeler. There are then the horrifying sounds of screams, howls, and wails as the darkness sets upon them. It's a deafening sound and lasts for some time before eventually subsiding. Only then do the characters seem as though they might have survived the worst.

Each of the characters then asks who this friend of Chris' is. Chris speaks to his friend, confirming whether he is who Chris thinks he is. His suspicions are confirmed.

Doug is his long-lost friend from high school. Doug explains that they are not safe and that he needs to lead them out of this world. Reluctantly they open the back of the trailer, only then noticing that the doors they seem to open are of a trailer seemingly paralleling the actual trailer in the physical world. As the characters step out from the trailer, they notice that the dark storm has all but disappeared, as has the distant light. Before them is a haunting scene of paramedics pulling bodies from the wreckage, one even trying to perform CPR on Aaron's lifeless form.

Doug tells the group that they need to get moving before the next storm comes, but Chris has already taken notice of something else of note. There is a dark shadowy form, that looks like it's hung up on the side of the trailer and as he leans in to figure out what it is he's looking at, the narrator surprises everyone as the dark remnant attacks Chris!

Chris' player, stunned by the turn in the story, wants to know what's happening to his character. The narrator explains how the smokey-like creature of pure pitch lunged at Chris, latching onto the side of

his face just as he was able to turn at the last second, and slowly starts to spread and cover Chris' body. Immediately, Chris picks up his iMPACT! token and plays it, backing up and explaining how as Chris was leaning in to examine the dark remnant, he had an unsettling feeling about it, and immediately stepped back, encouraging both Aaron and Beth that they should do what Doug says and get the hell away from this place.

The narrator continues from where Chris' player had left off. Chris and his long-lost friend Doug look to Beth and Aaron as they all agree that this strange and unfamiliar world is too dangerous, and follow this person Doug, who seemed to appear out of nowhere, through what seems like a portal from this world to another.

...and on the story goes from there.

