



**shock** social  
science  
fiction

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# What Is Shock: Social Science Fiction?

an overview

**W**hat happens when a mind is no longer tied to a body? What happens when those of greatest ability are enslaved by those of greatest power? What happens when Humanity is the new kid on the block? When minds are read like books and books are illegal?

Shock: Social Science Fiction is a game, a set of rules, that you're about to use with your friends to create some science fiction stories.

## **Shocking Gender**

Shock: uses genderless personal pronouns when the gender of a person — a character or a player — is unknown or is irrelevant. In these cases, Shock: uses the genderless personal pronouns preferred by many contemporary gender theorists, using “zie” instead of “she” or “he”, and “hir” instead of “he” or “she”. If this is disorienting to you, that's what a Shock is. If it's not, you'll feel right at home playing the game.

You'll create a world sitting around a table, or on a floor in a circle, and use these rules to reach agreement about events and features of the story so it makes sense — you'll share a vision of the world you've created.

**First, you'll make up some basic things about the world you're creating**, starting with some social issues

that concern you as players, then with the amplifier of science fiction, called a Shock, like space travel or human cloning.

You'll **then take authorial responsibility for one of the pieces of that world, either an Issue or the Shock**. Each of you will sketch out your piece of the world, working with each others' ideas until you know a little bit of what the world is like.

Once you know the most basic pieces of the world, **you'll make some characters** to tell stories about, designed specifically to address the issues of this world.

Each of you will be able to make the important decisions for a particular character, called a **Protagonist**, while others in the circle will play pieces of the world. You'll take turns playing your Protagonist while another player is responsible for playing the forces in the world that make life miserable for the Protagonist. This player, the **Antagonist**, works to keep the Protagonist from getting what zie wants, makes decisions about the forces the Protagonist is up against, and gives those forces a face. Other players are active members of the **Audience**, supporting one side or another in the course of the story, giving details about the world, and listening to the story unfold with the use of **Minutiæ**, little pieces of information that flesh out the world

#### Whatagonist?

The difference between a \*Tagonist (an Antagonist or Protagonist) and any other character in a story is that a \*Tagonist is a character who matters intimately to the story. Zie is at the core of the goings on of the events within the fiction. Other characters might be Links — characters who Protagonists care about — or Minutiæ, background

you started building at the beginning of the game, from wildlife to social systems, equipment to infrastructure.

To do this, the Protagonist and Antagonist players will tell little pieces of the story having to do with their respective pieces up until they disagree about what should happen next. Meanwhile, any player can make up Minutiæ.

Once the \*Tagonists disagree about the course the events should take because the fictional \*Tagonists are acting in opposition to each other, you'll **use Conflict rules to determine what happens next**. This is where the rubber meets the road for the story, where the unexpected takes place and hard decisions are made. Everyone, including Audience members will have at least a partial say in the outcome of these Conflicts, but the greatest say will be in the framing of the conflicts — what the Protagonist and Antagonist want.

After every Protagonist has had a couple of scenes (you'll see how to judge that) **the Protagonist's story will come to a climax** as zie confronts the questions set up for the character at the beginning of the story. Once that is addressed, the story is over and everyone should take a moment to reflect on what's happened.

Then, if you like, you can **add some new Issues and Shocks** to your world and begin some new stories in your world, **or you can start from scratch**, making a whole new world populated with new and passionate \*Tagonists.



# How to Play Shock:

## the rules of the game

**S**hock: is a game, a system of rules that helps you create fiction. By following these rules, you gain the benefits of agreement between the players about how things are going to work so you can create your fiction together.

### **Assemble the Pieces**

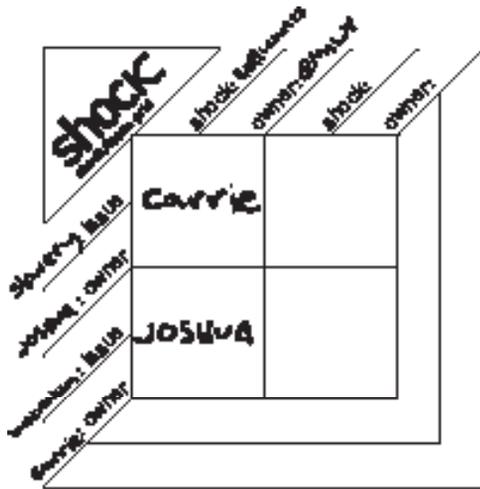
You will need several things to play Shock: Some of them come with this book, others you'll have to buy if you don't already own them, and some you may have to download or draw.

- Three to five friends, including you, sitting in a circle around a table or whatever. Do not try to download them.
- At least six 6-sided dice per player. Even better if you have two of a different color.
- Pencils — Characters change! Don't try to play with a pen! You have to rewrite elements all the time.

- Player Sheets — These have one side for the Protagonist you'll play and another side for the Antagonist you'll play. They can be copied from the back of this book.
- A Shock/Issue Grid (usually referred to as just “the Grid”) —This can be copied out of the back of the book.
- A stack of index cards (or other shared document) on which to write Minutiæ, the details that make your world unique.
- About 45 minutes to an hour per player. If you have more players than you've got time for, some of the players can play Audience for the whole game; only one player need play a Protagonist.

## Create a World

The first element you create to design your world is the Grid. A small one is shown here.



To make a grid, **throw down some ideas for a single Shock. A Shock is a radical difference between the players' world and the world in the fiction you're creating**, like "Replicants" or "The last groups of humans live in underground facilities". See the Mediography for

examples of Shocks. Write down the first cool idea someone has in the first slot at the top of the Grid as your Shock. There are spaces for more Shocks on the Grid for future use if you decide to return to this world in a future story, but you won't use those extra spaces now.

### Nothing's Shocking

What makes a Shock a Shock instead of an interesting Minutia?

It's something big. Something that changes the world. It can be loud or quiet, but it can't be meaningless. "Some people are androids" is a Shock because, even though the world looks and sounds like the one we know, something different is going on that the players know about, whether or not the \*Tagonists do. "Mind Transfer" is a Shock because it's a fundamental difference between the way we think of identity and the way it works in the story.

It's going to be at the core of the story you wind up creating. See the Mediography on page 68 for a list of Shocks that might inspire you.

**Now everyone should come up with one Issue.** Issues are **social and personal concerns the players have** and want to address with this story, such as "slavery" and "monogamy". See the Mediography for more examples of Issues.

Use the first good idea someone has. Like most things in Shock: you can go by this rule: **if someone's excited about it, go with it. If no one's excited about it and someone says no, move to the next idea.**

Now you need to see who gets to determine the fictional elements about the Shocks and Issues. How do Replicants work? What's the political system that allows for their existence? Pick the Issue or Shock you want to Own. If someone else wants to Own the same Issue as you, consider if

you want to have a Protagonist who addresses that Issue instead — no one can both Own an Issue and play a Protagonist who addresses that issue. If any players will only be playing Audience, one of them should Own the Shock, but otherwise, one player will Own both an Issue and the Shock.

Every player must Own at least one Issue.

The player names show who owns a particular Issue or Shock. That means that those players have the final say about every detail about the Shock or Issue they own.

When deciding who owns Shocks and Issues, remember: you will **either** be able to dictate all details about this Issue, **or** you'll be able to have a Protagonist that confronts it.

Now write your name in one of the boxes beside one of the Issues other than one you Own. Choose one that you think is interesting. It might be the one you suggested, but it can't be the one you Own. It's OK if someone else's name is already in that box but try to have a protagonist for each issue. Your protagonist will be set up to address that issue, and your Antagonist player will use it as a reference when figuring out what kind of challenges to offer.

## Making the First Minutiæ

Now that you know who Owns each of the Shocks and Issues, it's time to set some up some more concrete pieces about the world you're creating. **If you're the Owner of the Shock, start off saying a couple of things about how the Shock works**, leading up to the Issues owned by the other players, at which point those **Owners tell about how their Issues work relative to the Shock** and perhaps other Issues. Each time something is stated, it is written down on a new index card and is now true in this world.

This process doesn't end when you finish this preliminary worldbuilding. **At any time, when someone has an idea about how the world works, they can write down a Minutia on a card** and put it in the center of the table for everyone to use. As long as one person is excited about it or no one objects, it's true.

Don't step on each others' toes. **If what you're saying is within the realm of another player's element, ask them if what you say can be true, then let them explain how it is.** Every player must say a little bit about the element zie owns to set the stage. What year is this? Where does it take place? This part of the process should take about 15 minutes, tops, and generate about 10 Minutiæ, or 2-3 per player.

## Create \*Tagonists

Who are the main characters in the upcoming story? A detective, manipulated by a terrible bureaucracy? A space pirate fighting for her freedom? A lowly worker, afraid to join the Revolution?

Your Protagonist is one of the three ways you'll effect the upcoming story. Zie will be the center of the story when it's your turn. Look at your Issue and Shock and start to compose a character that addresses the intersection of the two.

Protagonists are made of several parts: **Features, Links, Story Goals,** and **Praxis.**

Begin building your Protagonist by writing down three **Features.** Features are characteristics that make your Protagonist unique. They might be possessions, personality traits, secondary characters, or destiny. You will start with three, and though we might learn about more Features, none of them will change meaningfully. If you're stumped for a third Feature, start with at least two and write the last one down as soon as your Protagonist is in hir first Conflict.

Next write your Protagonist's two **Links.** Links are things that your Protagonist is connected to: lovers, family members, religions, philosophies, business partners, drug dealers. Your Protagonist will never have more or fewer than two of these. Unlike Features, these will

almost certainly change in the course of play. These are the things your Protagonist won't want to be threatened, but you want to see threatened so you can see how your Protagonist deals with that.

### **Beating on the Protag**

You don't actually need a Story Goal to be a positive thing. Once you've played once or twice, try playing with a Story Goal like "I get killed," and see how it goes!

Next, write in your **Story Goal** for the Protagonist. A Story Goal is what you want from your Protagonist in the foreseeable (to you, the player) future. You might want your Protagonist to be Emperor of the Western Spiral Arm or to end a revolution or to bear the first human child in 20 years.

## **Praxis**

Now that you've got an idea who all your Protagonists are, you can determine how things get done in this world. These ways of getting things done are called **Praxis** and are represented by two pairs of opposites shared by all \*Tagonists in the story.

Look at your Features, Shocks, Issues, and Links. How do they suggest things are done? For instance, are there weapons listed? Maybe things are done with violence. Are there political contacts listed? Maybe things are done through negotiation. If an Issue is Income Disparity, maybe things are done by commerce.

Praxis are the ways in which characters confront challenges in their stories and this will have a profound effect on the character of the upcoming stories. All \*Tagonists share these, and they will inform the content of the stories you produce in this world. Do you want violence to be an option? Political negotiation? Discuss these possibilities with the other players, particularly those with Protagonists, and decide together what the options are.

Put methods of Praxis on the same side when you want them to represent a choice a character has to make between opposites — Violence vs. Compassion and Buying vs. Stealing, or Seduction vs. Coercion and Proxy vs. Personal Responsibility. Write down the names of each pair on both your Protagonist and Antagonist sheets.

Write a 3 in the center, where it says Features. This number will change over the course of the game, so write it in pencil. This is the number of dice you'll roll as a Protagonist in a Conflict. Note that the Antagonist does not have this number. **Pick a favored Praxis for each of you \*Tagonists. You will get a bonus dice when using that Praxis.**

## Building an Antagonist

Now **give some seed ideas about your Antagonist to the player to your left**, offering you opposition. Don't say too much, but give hir some pieces to work with, such as "She's my daughter, a revolutionary, and she wants me to join," or "It's a government agency that knows that I know too much." Once you've given hir that seed, it's hir responsibility to come up with good Minutiæ about that Antagonist.

**Antagonists have to be able to act intelligently** so they can act and react meaningfully to the Protagonist's actions. That's not to say that they have to be people, though; they could be opposing religions, government agencies or networked expert systems. Personhood just has to exist somewhere within the Antagonist.

Inappropriate Antagonists are those which don't care and will neither act against the Protagonist nor react when zie does something. Weather, asteroids, a black hole, and a random, uncaring God are all inappropriate. It is totally appropriate, though, to play a "random, uncaring" God where the player cares about what those random, uncaring (but actually cruel and deliberate) acts will do to the Protagonist. That's great, existential stuff.

Once you've told your Antagonist player these scraps, it's now hir job to flesh that character, agency, religion, army, or whatever

it is and give it a face. Then pick a favored Praxis like you did for your Protagonist.

## Playing an Antagonist

Your boss wants you to take responsibility for his fatal mistake. Your daughter wants you to join the revolution. A mysterious agency takes an inappropriate interest in your religious activities.

Opposition for the Protagonists is provided by their respective Antagonists. It is the job of the Antagonist player to push the Protagonist's buttons, and provide hard choices to the Protagonist player. **When the Protag player says what zie wants in a scene, threaten something else that they want more, or make something happen that they want to avoid.** Pay close attention to the Protagonist you're playing for. Without a decent Antagonist, the Protagonist will have too little to struggle against, or will wind up struggling against things that aren't interesting to hir.

Antagonists are built out of Praxis and Minutiæ — they don't have Links or Features. The first Minutiæ the Antagonist has should be the name of the character or institution that the Protagonist has given you. After that, the Minutiæ you create might be an army of robot assassins, supporting characters, control over a computer network, or other tools. Remember that the actions of an Antagonist are always motivated by **intention**: if there's a storm, the Antagonist is the character locking Protagonist

out of the storm shelter, or it's the character who controls the Weather Machine, not the natural, uncaring phenomenon itself.

These elements — Grid, Protagonists, and Antagonists —are all the tools you need to create a story. You've created a situation that you care about with the Grid, Protagonists who you care about, and Antagonists who will keep the situation untenable.

## Building a Scene

### Dynamic and Static Situations

A character in a **static situation** will be there until something changes.

A character in a **dynamic situation** is a character in conflict — and therein lies an event that will form the spine of your story, vertebra by vertebra.

A dynamic situation is one that will change the apparent course of the story no matter the outcome. Once in a dynamic situation, the Protagonist player will likely be calling for conflicts on hir own. Great! That means you're going in a productive direction. If things start getting slow, though, it's your job as Antagonist player to start yanking.

Think of the first scene of a movie. The protagonist is shown in hir normal state, doing what it is they do. Then something happens that pulls them out of that state, puts something they care about in danger. It can be as subtle as a relationship taking a bad turn, or as overt as a spacecraft being boarded.

Someone will have to be the first to play a Protagonist. It doesn't matter who, but someone's probably ready to roll.

When it's your turn to be an Protagonist for the first time, **your job will be to describe where you are normally and what you're doing.** This is exposition, an opportunity

to explore the character before things start pulling hir into trouble.

Each Protagonist player has set up a static situation, e.g. "I'm a detective on the space station," and given the Antagonist player a Story Goal with

which to make it dynamic, e.g. "End the corruption in the department".  
**It is the job of the Antagonist players to consider those points and push the Protagonist to make decisions** that will get hir closer to or further from those Goals.

In this example, the Antagonist might start the opening scene with the beginning of a case that could make or break the career of the detective, or perhaps evidence of corruption within the force. Look carefully at the Shock, Issue, and Story Goal of the Protagonist and consider suggestions from others at the table to determine what direction the first step leads. Then destroy the Protagonist's life.

In each subsequent turn, ask, "What are you doing now?" to start the scene.



# Resolving Conflict:

## what happens next?

A gunfight breaks out. An emotional argument threatens a family. A worker decides whether to join the Revolution or feed his family. A priest's faith is shaken.

These are the moments that make a story a story. **Every scene you play must have one Conflict.** If there's a point in a scene where there's a choice or struggle for what will happen next, use these Conflict Resolution rules to determine what will happen next. If there's not such a point, play along, narrating what the Protagonists and Antagonists do until you find one.

One of two situations will arise: either two \*Tagonists are in conflict with each other within the fiction, or two players are in conflict about the direction of the story with regard to their \*Tagonists.

The difference here is important. In the former, you're asking for something unexpected in the fiction — the characters are risking something in the fiction, so you want the outcome to be uncertain. In the latter, you're standing outside your characters for a moment and

looking at what might be the most interesting thing that could happen to them. You'll probably go back and forth between these stances, and that's fine.

## Declaring your Intent

The first thing the players do in a conflict is **state what they each**

**want.** "I want to take over the spacecraft." "I want Zed to acknowledge me as leader of the Rebellion." "I want to convince Kuato to run for President." These are called the players' Intent. Each participant in a Conflict has one of these, starting with the Protagonist. **The Protagonist says what zie wants first, then the Antagonist responds with hir own Intent.** Sometimes, the Antagonist says what zie wants first. That's OK, but assume that the Protagonist player will be defining hir Intent first.

### Conflict between players

If it is the players themselves, and not just the characters, disagreeing on the direction the story will go, it must be clear that all the players are willing to support a player who's in difficult emotional territory before continuing with the story line in question. Once you've set an Intent, you must be willing to live with it, should it come to pass. That means if you hurt someone's feelings, you remain responsible for the outcome of that conflict, including the response of the player on the other end of it. If you're not willing to do that, change your Intent. If that's obvious to you, great.

There are a few restrictions on what is a valid Intent:

- **Intents cannot settle the Story Goals of a player during the first scene.** This will happen in the third and final scene, in which the Intents should be about the Story Goal. Once the Story Goal is settled, it's settled and the story is over.
- You can not Intend to harm or otherwise directly effect another Protagonist unless zie is also in the Conflict.

- **Conflicts are never defensive, so stasis is not a valid Intent.**

Phrase them positively so no matter which way the Conflict goes, something important to the Protagonist will change. That will help you move from dynamic situation to dynamic situation, stopping at a static situation only at the end. You'll be able to protect your \*Tagonist through scoring your own Strikes.

- **The Intents of the players may not be mutually exclusive.**

If Alice and Bob both want their Protagonists to be king, you'll have to find other ways to frame their Intents; it's probably not exactly what they want anyway. For instance, Alice might want to have the backing of the People and Bob might want the throne itself. If Bob gets the throne, maybe Alice will be a popular leader. If Bob doesn't get the throne, maybe Alice does.

**Your Intent is tied to one of the four Praxis.** If, for instance, your Praxis are Spite vs. Compassion and Money vs. Violence, you might describe your Protagonist acting out of Compassion to represent your

### **Adversity Builds Character**

You may not want to win that badly, but instead set up a situation that can give you fodder for later Conflicts. To do that, use one of your weaker Praxis instead of one of your stronger. That way, if you do, in fact, fail, you'll have another Feature —and the die that comes with it — to help you when you really need it later.

side of the Conflict while your Antagonist describes how they're spending Money to get what they want. Avoid mentioning the Praxis. Instead, make it clear for the Audience through your stated actions and words. Remember, they have the final word on which Praxis fits your description. Keep in mind that **losing now may help you later.** Your favored Praxis might not be appropriate ("Do I want to resort to Violence to get my son to agree to help me?"), so you might consider actions that better fit another Praxis.

## Throwing Down

Once both players have settled on their Intents, it's time to roll and see what will happen. Maybe no one gets what they wanted and things will be complicated by the results, or maybe some participants will get what they wanted and some won't. Or maybe, in the most troubling situation of all, everyone will get what they wanted.

**If you're playing a Protagonist**, look at the Praxis on the Protagonist side of your player sheet.

**The Audience will tell you which Praxis** you'll be using based on your description of your actions. Remember that if you want to use a specific Praxis, you need to either make your description fit or ask the Audience what your Protagonist needs to do for it to count as that Praxis.

Pick up as many dice as you have Features. Remember to add in a bonus dice if using your favored Praxis. You can also add one dice for each Link that is featured and at risk in this conflict. Use a different color of dice to represent them so you know what happens to your relationship.

**If you're playing an Antagonist**, the Audience will decide which Praxis is most appropriate to the actions you are describing. Draw on the Minutiæ the Antagonist already has — characters, intentions, resources — to dictate how the Conflict will be pushed.

Roll 5 dice. Add a bonus dice if you're using your favored Praxis.

**If your \*Tagonists are not involved in this Conflict, you're Audience** in this scene. **Roll one dice to use at your discretion to effect the outcome of the Conflict with Minutiæ.** Every Audience member will be rolling one, but only the member who gets the highest number on that die gets to use hir Minutia. **Now tell how one of the Minutiæ in the middle of the table — either one that already exist or a new one you made up on the spot — changes the outcome of the Conflict.** As it normally works, if one person really likes the idea it stands; otherwise, as long as no one objects, it stands. See what happens with the \*Tagonists' dice before you decide what, if anything, you want to have happen to change the result — you might just want to let it be. If you have the high die and you let it be, no one else can step in.

## Comparing results

Once you've rolled the dice, you can determine who's winning the Conflict. **Look at your dice showing a 5 or a 6.** These are your Strikes. Protagonist, don't forget to set aside the dice from your Links.

**Now compare the numbers of Strikes between both \*Tagonists.** Each Strike of the Antagonist cancels one from the Protagonist. The Protagonist succeeds if there are at least one Strike left in their favor. If it's the Antagonist that has more strikes, they gain their Intent. In case of a tied result, **both \*Tagonists get what they want!** Have fun figuring out how it all works! This is also why it is important that Intents are not mutually exclusive.

At any point in this process, **the Audience player that has the high dice have an option to use their Minutia.** (See the Appendix, Playing the Audience.) Now, that Audience player should decide what to do: give a Strike to a \*Tagonist or let the result stand.

## Turning Up the Heat

As the Protagonist, you get to spend your leftover Strikes on consequences to your actions. For each such Strike, pick one consequence from the list in the sidebar. Whatever you don't choose, the Antagonist gets to subvert it and makes a complication happen. Pick wisely.

### **Tough Love for the Protag**

- You accomplish your Intent.
- You don't suffer any harm or cost.
- It doesn't cause any harm or cost to others.

Now look at the Link dice you rolled. Did any come up as a Strike? Great! It means that the conflict either spared or improved your relationship. In case of a miss result, it means your relationship is either complicated by the conflict or maybe even severed. If you rolled for both Links in that conflict, you get to assign which dice result goes with which Link.

Rewrite your Links to reflect the impacts of the conflict.

## Fallout for Failure

When you lose a Conflict, you gain something in return.

**If your Protagonist is the character who just lost, give hir a new Feature** that could result from this Conflict. **Add one to the Features box** in the middle of the Praxis. That's the number of dice you'll roll in your next Conflict.

## The Cycle Continues

Once the Conflict is resolved, **play passes to the next player**, with the Antagonist player of last turn now playing hir own Protagonist. The new Antagonist player asks, "What are you doing now?"

# How to play an Antagonist

## making life hard

You are the Protagonist's worst nightmare. You're the reason she's lost her rank, the smuggler who has the drugs he needs to survive, the creeping sense that zie's really an android. And that player, sitting right there on your right, will love you for it.

You have some specific responsibilities when playing an Antagonist, and all of them revolve around highlighting and challenging the Protagonist and hir player.

- Remember that you're the Protagonist player's partner. The opposition you're putting there is to push hir in fruitful directions. Your Antagonist, however, is the enemy of the Protagonist.
- When you see a Link on the Protagonist's sheet, use it whenever you can. If it's a person, use them as the Antagonist in this scene, or threaten their well-being so that the Protagonist will be able to risk that Link. If there's no person directly available from that

Protagonist's sheet, use one from someone else's, or invite another Protagonist into the scene.

- Play hard. Make your Intent something the Protagonist truly doesn't want to see happen.
- Make sure that Intents are focused. Intents do not **endanger**, they **do**.
- Always pay attention to the Protagonist's Story Goal, Issue, and Shock. If you don't know what to do, use one of them to push on hir by setting Intents that make .
- Watch out for static situations. There should be only two in the course of the story: the one at the beginning and the ending. If another one creeps in (for instance, the Protagonist won hir intent "I shake my pursuers"), you may not obviate hir victory, but you must find a way to pull events toward the Story Goal. ("The clone you liberated matures over the course of a week, growing into its memories. It wants to go home. It misses its master.")
- When you're about to play the third scene, it's time to directly confront the Story Goal of the Protagonist. It can be phrased negatively or positively by either \*Tagonist, but there must be only one result that yields a positive result to the Story Goal.

### Some examples of Intents

Strong: "If I win, the boy will die."  
"Vox finds out that you were lying."  
"Ruth never speaks to you again."

Weak: "If I win, the boy will be in danger of dying."  
"Vox finds the document that says you were lying."  
"Ruth says she'll never speak to you again."

The difference between these is that the strong ones require a response on the part of the Protagonist. They're unequivocal. The Protagonist player will care about these things and will have to make choices between what zie wants and stopping the Antagonist from gaining hir Intent.



The Casbah from **Digging for Mold in the Company Town**. In the distance is the Space Elevator, owned by the Company. This view is up Zero Street, leading into the Elevator wherein the managerial arm of the Company lives and works. The workers are filled with a mold that makes them able to live in the hostile environment but is also a corporate secret, binding them to their company town by contract.



# Ending a Story

## A final statement

**T**he satisfied expression on the face of the dead Protagonist. The liberation of a people. The descent into madness. The shocking revelation.

At some point, the Protagonist will be confronting hir Story Goal. This will come about when you're playing your third scene. It's time to do the best thing you can do in a story: **end it**.

### Phrasing Your Final Intent

Alice has a Story Goal, "Find out my true identity," and Bob is playing her Antagonist.

Here are some different ways Alice and Bob might phrase the Intent.

Alice: I get to find out who I am.

Bob: I'm going to erase your identity once and for all.

Alice: I will remain in blissful ignorance.

Bob: I'm going to show you who you are.

This is the final statement the player can make in this story, so consider how you want to phrase the Intents.

Do you want to phrase it positively, so if the Protagonist accomplishes hir Intent, zie accomplishes the Story Goal?

Or negatively, so zie will only accomplish it if zie fails?

Which \*Tagonist's Intent will settle the matter: the Protagonist's or the Antagonist's?

An ending is a beautiful part of a story. Enjoy it, give an epilogue so the players can all see and participate in the closing.

When this story's over, you may want to play another with the same character, or you may want to start a new one.

## Making a New Protagonist

You can make a new Protagonist from scratch, just like you did the first time.

## Keeping the Old Protagonist

**Take the three Features you like the most** in this Protagonist and discard the rest. Now, consider how this last story changed the Protagonist and change your favored Praxis if it makes sense.

**Keep Links the way they are.** If they're going to change, they'll do it in the course of a story.

**The Story Goal must change** to reflect new circumstances.

Discuss with your Antagonist player **how the Antagonist has changed over the course of this story**, as well. The Antagonist player should change the Minutiæ to reflect the current state.

## Rearranging the Pieces

Each player may now **add a new Issue to the Grid** and change ownership if you like. If a new Shock has emerged through play, discuss using it in addition to the current Shock and assign ownership of it as usual. Make a new Protagonist/Antagonist pair as normal with the renovated Grid.



A man who has lost his identity hops into his newly purchased sports body from **Trash in the Hopper**. His mind and consciousness enter the new body, but must return briefly to his birth body, atrophying both physically and emotionally, before entering another.



# Playing the Audience

## throwing popcorn

**A** micrometeoroid pierces the side of the ship. The end of the world comes as planned. A law is broken. These are the effects that the larger world has on the course of the story. As Audience, you'll be playing that larger world.

When you don't have a \*Tagonist in a scene, you're the Audience, responsible for representing circumstance and background events. To do this, you roll a d6 when the \*Tagonists roll their dice. Whoever has the highest number showing gets to use that Strike if zie wishes by picking a side in the conflict and may narrate a little piece of circumstance, using some of the Minutiæ on the table or making one up on the spot.

Your job as an Audience member is to **push things the way you want them to go by giving a Strike to a \*Tagonist** or letting their results stand. You're not playing the Antagonist, so if you want something to go well for the Protagonist, that's great! Do what you can. But if you think it's fun for the Protagonist to suffer, you can do that too. Your decisions are your own.

## An Uncaring, Cruel Universe

Sometimes your Minutiæ will be about the locale and its dangers; maybe you're in an asteroid field and the Protagonist can hide inside of the larger ones. Or perhaps your Minutiæ include a map of the city and you can narrate that the Antagonist finds help in the back alleys of the neighborhood the action is taking place in.

## A Caring, Cruel Universe

**Background characters are also Minutiæ.** When a character is needed to make something happen as a Minutiæ, the Audience member with the highest showing die can portray a character changing the course of events, perhaps helping or hindering the Protagonist in the scene, speaking and making decisions for that character. It can even be your own Protagonist when it's not your turn.

Like other Minutiæ, these **background characters can be Owned.** If another player has been portraying a background character in a fun way, you can use your die to change the course of events the way you like, but have that player portray the character the way they like to achieve your ends.



# Hacks

## clever solutions

**A** Protagonist you love to hate. A complex conspiracy. A shared vision. These techniques can help with such specifics.

### Beating on Your Protagonist

Sometimes, you want a Protagonist to suffer. When this is the case, you can strategize a little to make sure you retain control of your parts of the Protagonist's story.

- Fail early, fail often. Since failure in a Conflict gives you an increasing number of Features, and therefore dice, playing to your Protagonist's weaknesses will get you more and more of what you want
- Pick a favored Praxis that your Protagonist doesn't want us anymore. Maybe zie wants to stop resorting to violence, but is more effective when doing so. Make the bonus dice a temptation to fall back on old habits.

If you do this, you'll very likely have a large number of Features, giving you the opportunity to take some real control at the end of the story.

## Laying Out Minutiæ

Consider laying out your Minutiæ on the table so that they represent family trees, maps, or conspiracy charts. In addition to helping you remember what's important, it might be useful as a reminder of the relationships of certain characters or locations.

## Inverting the Grid

Try laying out a Grid with a single Issue and several Shocks. Once you've settled on your Issue, take the first good idea someone comes up with as a Shock as usual, but don't write it down. Instead, come up with several sub-Shocks and write those down. For instance, if you decide that the single Shock is "Life in a space station", the Shocks you play with might be "Networked democracy", "Space war", and "Intelligent Robots".



# Mediography

## influential information

**M**any media have influenced Shock: movies, comics, books, other games, TV shows, and even the news. Here's a sample of those influences, listed with Issues and Shocks that you might use to play a similar story.

This bibliography is not, of course, comprehensive. Some books I've left out because I didn't like them or I didn't consider them relevant. And then, of course, I've left out media with which I'm not familiar enough to make the critical assessment required to determine the Shocks and Issues. There is a vast universe of good science fiction that can serve as inspiration to a game of Shock: Make your own recommendations and read those of others at the glyphpress website.

You may disagree with some of the assessments I've made. They are by no means canon. They are my own critical analysis and you will play with these ideas as your group sees fit.

-Joshua A.C. Newman

## Novels

**Asimov, Isaac: The Caves of Steel. Foundation. Robot Dreams.**

Shocks: Robots are perfect people. Psychohistory.  
Collapse of civilization.

Issues: Humanity's inhumanity. Hierarchical government.  
Xenophobia.

**Barker, Clive: Imajica.**

Shocks: Alternate reality. Technology of soul.

Issues: Sexuality. Messianic religion. Self-hatred.  
Demagoguery.

**Bradbury, Ray: Martian Chronicles. Dinosaur Tales.**

Shocks: Telepathy. Alien contact. Time travel.

Issues: Xenophobia. Mental illness. Colonialism. Ecological  
destruction.

**Card, Orson Scott: Ender's Game.**

Shock: Alien war.

Issues: National identity. Individual morality.

**Clarke, Arthur C.: Childhood's End. 2001 / 2010.**

Shock: Alien contact.

Issues: Xenophobia. Cold war. Cargo cults. Religion. The soul and humanity.

**Dick, Philip K.: Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (see also Blade Runner, below). The Eye of the Sybil and Other Collected Stories.**

Shock: Constructible and False reality

Issues: Humanity. Individuality.

**Heinlein, Robert: Starship Troopers. Stranger in a Strange Land.**

Shocks: Alien war. Alien philosophy.

Issues: Meritocracy. Loyalty. Socially constructed reality.

**Herbert, Frank: Dune.**

Shocks: Precognition. Extreme longevity. Instantaneous star travel. Artificial religion.

Issues: Monopoly. Demagoguery. Tyranny.

**Huxley, Aldous: Brave New World.**

Shocks: Eugenics/cloning. Hypnopædia

Issues: Comfortable totalitarianism. Humanity as a natural creature.

**LeGuin, Ursula K. : The Left Hand of Darkness.**

Shock: Genderless humanity.

Issues: Nationhood. Selfishness.

**Orwell, George: 1984.**

Shocks: Thought Police, Language Control

Issues: Totalitarianism. Individual thought.

**Robinson, Kim Stanley: Red Mars / Green Mars / Blue Mars.**

Shocks: Exploration of Mars. Genetic engineering.  
Terraforming. Extreme longevity. Easy transit to Mars.

Issues: Manifest Destiny. Demagoguery. Mythmaking.  
Culture clash. Corporate ownership. Culture creation. Politics. Pragmatic politics. Torture. Science.

**Rucker, Rudy: Hardware / Wetware / Freeware.**

Shocks: Self-sustaining artificial life.

Issues: Drug addiction. Social revolution. Mathematics as philosophy.

**Sterling, Bruce: *Distraction. Holy Fire.***

Shocks: Cloning. Social responsibility of science.  
Immortality.

Issues: American politics. Passion and art.

**Verne, Jules: *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea, The Mysterious Island***

Shock: A submarine.

Issues: Capitalism. Imperialism. Racism.

**Vonnegut, Kurt: *Harrison Bergeron.***

Shock: Enforced equality.

Issues: Freedom of expression.

**Wells, H.G. : *War of the Worlds. The Time Machine.***

Shocks: Marsian invasion. Time travel.

Issues: Colonialism. Class struggle.

**Wilson, Robert Anton: *Illuminatus! Trilogy, The. Schrödinger's Cat Trilogy, The.***

Shock: Reality-spanning conspiracy.

Issues: Beliefs as weakness. Reality as a reflection of the  
human mind.

# Graphic Fiction

## **Bendis, Brian Michael and Oeming, Michael Avon: Powers**

Shock: Super powers.

Issues: Individual morality vs. sanctioned ethics.

## **Ellis, Warren and Robertson, Darrick: Transmetropolitan**

Shock: Super-effective gonzo journalism!

Issues: Freedom of the Press. Political corruption.  
Journalistic vs. Personal Ethics

## **Ellis, Warren and Sprouse, Chris: Ocean**

Shock: Alien technology.

Issues: Corporate ownership. Weapon proliferation.

## **Morrison, Grant et al.: Invisibles, The**

Shocks: Mind over Matter/magic. World-spanning  
conspiracy.

Issues: Propaganda. Individualism. Destiny.

## **Shirow, Masamune: Ghost in the Shell**

Shocks: Cyberbrains. Ubiquitous information.

Issues: Definition of the soul. (see also Ghost in the Shell:  
Stand Alone Complex, below)

### **Speed-McNiel, Carla: Finder**

Shocks: Indestructible body. Post-apocalyptic society.

Issues: Classism. Insular society. Love. Family duty. Noble savages. Culture clash.

## **Serial Video**

### **Babylon 5**

Shocks: Myriad alien species. God is a character.

Issues: Racial hatred. Colonization. Authoritarianism.  
Religion.

### **Battlestar Galactica**

Shocks: Cylon invasion. They look like us now.

Issues: Military vs. Civil Government. Civil rights of prisoners. Personal vs. formal duty. McCarthyism.

### **Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex (see also **Ghost in the Shell** under **Graphic Fiction**, above.)**

Shocks: Cyberbrains. Ubiquitous information.

Issues: Definition of the soul.

## **Star Trek, TOS**

Shock: The Prime Directive.

Issues: Race relations. Cold War. Logic vs. Passion.  
Authoritarianism. Demagoguery.

## **Twilight Zone, The**

Shocks: Time travel. Space travel. A printing press that prints tomorrow's news. Apocalypse.

Issues: Cold War. Beauty. We're all brothers. Abuse of power.

## **Movies**

### **Blade Runner**

Shock: Replicants among us.

Issues: Slavery. Corporate ownership. Classism. Empathy.

### **Logan's Run**

Shocks: You "renew" at 30. Outside is mythical.

Issues: Don't Trust Anyone Over 30. Utopia has a cost.  
Totalitarianism. Dependence on technology we don't understand.

### **Metropolis**

Shock: Underground City, Artificial People.

Issues: Paternalism, Social Class.

### **Planet of the Apes**

Shocks: Trapped in Ape society.

Issues: Theocracy. Does Humanity deserve to survive?  
Social revolution.

### **Silent Running**

Shock: Earth's natural environment remains only on a  
space ship.

Issues: Environmental collapse. Political decisions about  
natural processes.

### **Soylent Green**

Shocks: Overpopulation. Environmental crash.

Issues: Self-determination. Sanctity of humanity.

### **Truman Show, The**

Shock: Life in a fictional world

Issues: Surveillance, The World Exists for Me. Appearance  
and Conformity. Bread and circuses.

## **Until The End Of The World**

Shocks: Borderless world. Dream machine.

Issues: Love. Information ownership. Addiction.

## **Zardoz**

Shocks: Constructed religion. Perfect humans.

Issues: Religion as craft. Morality without consequences.  
Social control.

## **2001 / 2010**

Shocks: Contact with God/Alien intelligence.

Issues: Soul as animal nature. Soul as information.

## **Audio**

### **Kraftwerk**

All of Kraftwerk's music from Autobahn (1974) and later are about how technologies — mostly highways and telecommunications — impact human relationships.

### **Welcome to Mars**

Ken Hollings presents a live twelve-part series of unscripted reflections on the fantasy of science

in the early years of the American Century. With electronic sound production by Simon James.

<http://tinyurl.com/hg3wl>

## **Philosophy and Nonfiction**

### **Braitenberg, Valentino: Vehicles**

A brief, witty, and convincing explanation of cybernetics: information theory as applied to the mind, emotions, and the living experience.

### **Sterling, Bruce: The Hacker Crackdown**

A detailed account of the United States' attempt at understanding and persecuting for crimes that didn't exist. The government's increasingly ham-handed attempts at persecuting non-criminals for non-crimes is a great primer for any issues dealing with government interference in civilian life.

### **Toffler, Alvin: Future Shock**

Future Shock is the source of the title of this game. Future shock is the culture shock we experience as our present becomes more and more alien to us .

## Shocks

### The New York Times — Science Times

Every Tuesday, the New York Times has a section devoted to science and technology. A few pages of this, and you should be bristling with ideas.

### Popular Science

Each month, there's something in that magazine that would change the world if things went a certain way. The magazine's primarily interested in technology, not science proper, so it's a good source for Minutiæ, as well.

### Scientific American

Often the items in Scientific American are good for both Issues and Shocks, since it's interested both in extraordinary phenomena of the universe and the social consequences of those phenomena.

## Issues

### Read the news.

Once you're done reading the Science Times, flip to the front of the paper. Anything that makes you happy, sad, or angry is a good Issue to use.

## **A Living Bibliography**

### **The glyphpress website**

glyphpress.com is the place to discuss other works not mentioned here. You can discuss your games and add to the online bibliography in the forum.

## **Role-Playing Games**

### **Thematic ancestors of Shock:**

#### **Cyberpunk**

With its Empathy stat and Life Path generator, this game could be used to discuss the Shock of dehumanizing cybernetics on personal relationships.

#### **Paranoia**

The Shocks in this game are deliberately of a silly volume: mutant powers, life in a fallout shelter, The Computer, secret societies. The issue, though, was stuck to religiously: Totalitarian control through fear and ignorance.

## **Mechanical ancestors of Shock:**

### **Dogs in the Vineyard**

An early draft of these rules used a Dogs-like system of see-and-raise. It didn't work, but it helped me figure out the direction to go.

### **Nine Worlds**

Nine Worlds' system of creating character details was useful inspiration to character creation.

### **Polaris**

Polaris' distributed opposition system was used as the basis for the distribution of authorial power in Shock:

### **Prime Time Adventures**

Fan Mail became Minutiæ as I figured out how the mechanic really works. In many ways, Shock: is a purpose-build modification of PTA.

### **The Shadow of Yesterday**

TSoY gave me the idea of using dice, rather than modifiers, for showing approval. The Keys also morphed into Links.

## **Snap**

Snap has a mechanic wherein the winner of a conflict gets the stakes while the loser gets resources for later. so here it is, in Shock:

## **Trollbabe**

Trollbabe's "Number" became the Praxis Scales. Becoming better at one thing while becoming worse at another is a great way to help a player clearly define a character — or, should the player choose, throw the character to the wind by choosing something in the middle.

## **With Great Power...**

With Great Power... , like Snap, also makes you choose between winning now and gaining resources for later.



# Glossary

## terms of service

### **Antagonist**

A character whose interests are opposite those of the Protagonist. Can be close to or far from the Protagonist; a lover or enemy, a child or partner. The reason the Protagonist does what zie does. (see also Protagonist, \*Tagonist)

### **Audience**

A player who doesn't have an \*Tagonist in a given Conflict. Some players may only play Audience members, while others may just not have a \*Tagonist in a particular scene.

### **Feature**

A trait belonging to a Protagonist, e.g. personality traits, physical characteristics, tools, vehicles and weapons. (see also Praxis, Link)

**Grid**

The tool used in World Creation to determine what Issue each player will confront and what Shock zie will use to confront it, as well as determining who will own each of those. (see also Shock, Issue)

**Hir**

Gender neutral third person personal possessive pronoun. Compare to “his”, “hers”, or “her”. (see also Zie)

**Issue**

A social or personal concern of the players. (see also Shock, Grid)

**Link**

Emotional connections the Protagonist has, e.g. philosophies, loved ones, and religions. (see also Praxis, Feature)

**Minutia**

Descriptions of the world in which the \*Tagonists live. They can be drawings, notes, graphs, or any other form of information describing locations, secondary characters, objects, social systems, or other details. They are used by non-\*Tagonists in a conflict to influence its outcome, representing outside influence. Minutiæ also define an Antagonist. (see also Grid, Shock, Issue)

**Opposition**

The opposite side in a Conflict from a particular \*Tagonist. An Antagonist will conflict with a Protagonist. A Protagonist can conflict with other Protagonists or Antagonists.

**Player**

A real person mechanically involved by playing an Antagonist, a Protagonist, a background character, or circumstance and world events via Minutiæ.

**Praxis**

An avenue of action that a significant character can take in a given world. Represented by two group choices at world creation about valid ways to confront conflicts in that world, and two choices each character has at character creation about which ways will be the most effective. (see also Fulcrum)

**Protagonist**

The character whose actions will define the nature of the story. Composed of an Issue, a Shock, some Features and Links, and Fulcra on the Praxis Scales. (see also Antagonist, \*Tagonist)

**Shock**

A radical difference between the world of the players and the world of the \*Tagonists. Used as a magnifying lens to look at Issues in the course of play. (see also Grid, Issue)

**\*Tagonist**

Any significant character, Antagonist or Protagonist, as separate from background characters. Term taken from the “wildcard” character used in Unix regular expressions. (see also Antagonist, Protagonist)

**Zie**

Gender-neutral third-person personal pronoun. Compare to “he” or “she”. (see also Hir)

