Be
ReaL

a roleplaying game

Be Real

Be Real is a game about exploring an interesting character in a situation that will change their life. Specifically, this character will be a person in a tough neighborhood whose identity is defined by a specific image, and the situation will be a sort of local Judgment Day.

In imagining the fiction for this game, I draw primarily on movies, particularly Clockers (1995) and The Gunfighter (1950). Other films that inspired me with how they dealt with Image in tough places: Menace 2 Society, Silverado, Boyz N the Hood, The Cooler, Seven Samurai, Yojimbo.

THE PLAY GROUP

One player controls the Neighborhood, including all people within it (Non-Player Characters = "NPCs" for short) apart from the player characters. We'll call this player the GM for familiarity's sake.

Four players play characters. (Player Characters = "PCs" for short)

So that's five players total.

You also need 5 pens/pencils, 6-10 sheets of paper, and one ten-sided die.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The entirety of play takes place within the Neighborhood. The players can customize the neighborhood significantly, but a few things MUST be true about the Neighborhood for the duration of play:

1) The Neighborhood is isolated and insular. People within the neighborhood deal extensively with each other and rarely with outsiders.

2) The Neighborhood is small, but not tiny. It's not quite "we all know each other's names", but just about everyone recognizes just about everyone else.

3) The Neighborhood is dangerous because it includes dangerous people.

4) There are multiple groups within the Neighborhood who wield social influence (think street gangs). Four of these groups correspond to the four Images (see Character Creation).

THE SITUATION

About once every 30-50 years, the Days of Judgment arrive in the Neighborhood. The violent die violently, swindlers get swindled, heroes sacrifice themselves, and glad-handing players choke on their indulgences.

People recognize the signs. The Neighborhood has been closed off. None may enter or leave until the Hour of Judgment has passed. [[JASON'S IMAGE #2 GOES HERE]]

In the hour of Judgment, all in the Neighborhood whose lives are clearly aimed at a certain bad fate will meet that fate. Exception is made only for those who have risen to the pinnacle of their roles, embracing their fates with no need for another to bring them.

Today is Monday. The Hour of Judgment is noon on Friday. Unless you can stop it.

PLAY STRUCTURE

1) Build characters and a Neighborhood.

2) Once you're done with that, begin the play cycle. It goes:

   Conference Scene - the PCs receive clues and news, and form theories and plans

   Conflict Scene - the PCs put their Images on the line to test their theories.

   There are three cycles per day of the week, so that's a maximum of 12 cycles before Friday. The minimum number of cycles is technically 4, but is realistically more like 8. Using all 12 should not be uncommon.

3) Final Scene. The end of play for these characters and this Neighborhood.

Character and Neighborhood Creation

NEIGHBORHOOD CREATION - BASICS

The basics and primary points of interest for the Neighborhood are not secrets. Even though only the GM will make up Neighborhood content during play, before play starts all the players will build the Neighborhood together. Answer the following questions:

1) Where is the Neighborhood? Los Angeles? Hong Kong? Somewhere in the American South?

2) Why is the Neighborhood isolated and insular? Geography? Culture? Traffic and transportation? Something else?

3) What's the ethnic composition of the Neighborhood? All white? All black? All Cherokee? Heavily multi-racial? Bi-racial? Racial tension is not intended to be a part of the game, unless players feel like they can better "get into" their characters and the game's situation by including it. Portraying someone of a different race than you are is also not required.

4) What's the economic composition of the Neighborhood? All poor? All rich? Half rich, half poor? The full spectrum? Remember, it has to make sense that the Neighborhood isn't interfered with by outsiders. Powerful rich folks who can call in law enforcement or military from outside the Neighborhood are a no-no.

As you're pondering and discussing these, look for inspirations for a character to play!

If you're not inspired for this part, go with:
1) The city the players are in.
2) It's an island with one bridge to the mainland.
3) Racial mix corresponds to the players'.
4) All poor.

CHARACTER IMAGES

Be Real deals with four specific Images. Each Image corresponds to a Method of getting what you want.

IMAGE . . . METHOD
Bad Motherfucker . . . Violence (do what I want because I can hurt you)
Angler . . . Deal Making (do what I want because it's good business)
Charmer . . . Charm (do what I want because you like me)
Hero . . . Moral High Ground (do what I want because it's "right" -- this generally means "good for the Neighborhood", but could relate to a religious or legal definition as well)

The four players must each pick one Image, such that all four are represented in the group. The PCs will be friendly and be working together, so keep that in mind.

Each option comes with a Fate. This is what will happen to you if you continue to use this Method to further this Image.

METHOD . . . FATE
Violence . . . Murdered in heat of moment
Deal Making . . . Assassinated (or, Robbed/scammed and left to starve?)
Charm . . . Overdose (or, Ostracized, no one will speak to you?)
Moral High Ground . . . Self-sacrifice

POPULATING THE NEIGHBORHOOD WITH SECTIONS

Identify a section of the Neighborhood for each Method. This Section can be a literal group, the residents of a specific place, or just a general type of person. The key for a Section is that it needs to makes sense that Image within it is competitive.

a) What is the Violent section? Who's competing to be the Baddest Motherfucker around?
b) What is the Deal-Making section? Who's competing to be the savviest Angler around?
c) What is the Charm section? Who's competing to be the most liked?
d) What is the Hero section? Who's competing for the Moral High Ground?

Examples: (a) gang members, (b) drug dealers, (c) kids, (d) cops

While you are working this out, feel free to swap character Images among players if you get new ideas for how you want to play.

POPULATING THE NEIGHBORHOOD WITH INDIVIDUALS

All five players come up with four names for NPCs and write them down on separate sheets of scrap paper. Each name should be accompanied by a Section and a brief descriptor clause.

Out of the four, exactly two must be from the Civilian Section (not competing for Image). The other two must be from among the four identified Sections. The GM does this differently, creating four from the Sections and zero civilians.

The descriptor should be the shortest possible way of identifying and distinguishing the NPC.

Example:
Jen Williams - Civilian - sexy teen
Jerome Davis - Civilian - nerdy store clerk
Nick Smith - Gang Member - pick-up basketball star
Reed Nichols - Kid - tiny wannabe gangsta

So now, among the five players, you now have 20 NPC names -- 8 Civilians and 12 people form the Sections.

BENEFACTORS AND DEPENDENTS

Each PC has one Benefactor and one Dependent.

A Benefactor is a Civilian who sustains your current existence in the Neighborhood.

Example people: an older relative, a spouse, an employer, a landlord

Example help: they give you shelter, food, job, or simply love, comfort and sanity.

Whatever they give you, it's important to you, and they will take it away if your Image-bolstering pushes them too far.

A Dependent is a Civilian who relies on you, much the way you rely on your benefactor. It is a relationship you have voluntarily maintained. However the relationship began, you actually care for this person, and help them through life.

Example people: your child, a younger sibling, a handicapped person, a homeless person, an orphan, a spouse

Whatever you give to them, it's known in the Neighborhood that they matter to you, and they will be a target for anyone who bears you a grudge.

Picking Your Benefactor and Dependent

The players take turns picking from the 8 Civilians on the list of 20 NPCs. On your first turn, you can pick an NPC and choose them as either your Benefactor or your Dependent; it doesn't matter which order you pick them in.

You cannot pick the same NPC as both your Benefactor and your Dependent.

No two PCs may have the same NPC as their Dependent.*

No NPC may be one PC's Benefactor and another PC's Dependent.*

Two or more PCs MAY have the same NPC as their Benefactor.

* this is so the PCs don't wind up at cross-purposes -- having motives to kill each other would ruin the game. After you've played Be Real once through, make your own call as to whether you'd like to play with PCs at potential cross-purposes in this way.

How Your Image Jeopardizes Your Benefactor and Dependent

As soon as the PC group has won a Conflict (thus costing someone Image), you've got people in the Neighborhood who'd like to retaliate. They won't do it as long as you stay relevant, but if your current Primary Image ever drops below 3, it's open season on those closest to you.

You can't hide your Dependents and Benefactor. As long as they're in the Neighborhood, it's possible that someone will get to them.

At the beginning of each Conference Scene, the GM rolls a d10 for the fate of each NPC at risk.

For Dependents:
1-3 Nothing
4-8 Abducted
9-10 Killed

For Benefactors:
1-8 Nothing
9-10 Abducted

For anyone who was abducted:
On a roll of 9 or higher, they are killed. That target number drops by one in every subsequent Conference Scene. So, in the 2nd Conference Scene post-abduction, they die on an 8 or higher, etc.

As soon as your Primary Image gets above 2, the threats of death and abduction end, although abducted NPCs stay abducted until your Primary Image hits 6. In the Final Scene of the game, players can decide the fates of any of their abducted Dependents and Benefactors, regardless of their Image.

How Your Image Alienates Your Benefactor and Dependent

Word gets around the Neighborhood. That's what image is. When you gain it or lose it, there's no hiding that from those close to you.

Everyone knows what a Number One is: someone to be respected, but also feared. Number Ones are despised by civilians. The closer your Image gets to that of a Number One, the more likely your Benefactors and Dependents are to want you out of their lives.

A soon as your Primary Image rises above 7, the GM begins rolling on the following tables for each Conference scene:

For Benefactors:
1-3 Nothing
4-8 Alienated
9-10 Sworn Off (refuses to every have contact with you again)

For Dependents:
1-8 Nothing
9-10 Alienated

Each time you gain another point of Image, the GM applies a penalty point to this roll (for those who haven't already Sworn Off). So, for an Image 10 (8+2), your Dependent would be Alienated on a roll of 7 (9-2) or higher.

PICKING THE NUMBER ONES

Take a look at the list of the 12 Section members. Make sure each Section has at least one representative -- if not, make up a new NPC (with name and descriptor) for the unrepresented Section(s).

Now take turns picking from among the 12+ names to identify the Number Ones of each Section -- these are the NPCs with the highest Image scores per Section. You can pick the Number One of your own Section or of another player's Section. Feel free to discuss as you make your picks.

PICKING THE SCRUBS

Of the remaining 8+ Section members on your NPC list, take turns picking names to identify the useful Scrubs of each Section -- people who have established Images and connections, but aren't that high up in their Section.

Again, make sure each Section has at least one Scrub, and add new NPCs if needed.

SECRET STATS FOR THE NPCS

The GM writes down the Scrubs on his secret GM Sheet, which must be hidden from the players at all times!
The GM writes down 4-5 other NPCs on his GM Sheet, ditching a few from the list if need be.
The GM writes down the Number Ones on his GM Sheet.

The GM secretly rolls Image numbers for all the NPCs. The method isn't secret, though. Here it is:
Scrubs roll 1d4+2
Number Ones roll 1d4+7
Others roll 1d4+4

If the players look at that list, the knowledge of those ranges approximates the knowledge their characters have of the individuals within those categories. For example, everyone in the Neighborhood knows a Number One has a really powerful (but not unattainable) Image!

Character Sheet

Write down:

Fate: [Murdered in heat of moment] ...or whatever Fate corresponds to the Image you picked.

Benefactor: (name, brief description)
Dependent: (name, brief description)
Grudges: (leave blank for now)

Bad Mofo (Violence): [6]
Angler (Deal-Making): 0
Charmer (Charm): 0
Hero (Moral High Ground): 0

...or wherever the "6" belongs, according to which Image you picked.

Grab a pile of 6 dice (or chips, or whatever).

GM Sheet

 1 - Bad Mofo Scrub: (name, brief description, Image rank)
 2 - Angler Scrub: (name, brief description, Image rank)
 3 - Charmer Scrub: (name, brief description, Image rank)
 4 - Hero Scrub: (name, brief description, Image rank)
 5 - (Image: name, brief description, Image rank)
 6 - (Image: name, brief description, Image rank)
 7 - (Image: name, brief description, Image rank)
 8 - (Image: name, brief description, Image rank)
 9 - (Image: name, brief description, Image rank)
10 - Bad Mofo Number One: (name, brief description, Image rank)
11 - Angler Number One: (name, brief description, Image rank)
12 - Charmer Number One: (name, brief description, Image rank)
13 - Hero Number One: (name, brief description, Image rank)

When the players go to test a theory, roll on this list to see which of these NPCs offers to answer them. Roll 1d10 + a modifier for the day of the week, and select the NPC corresponding to teh number you rolled, using the numbers at the left.

Day modifiers:
Monday - 0
Tuesday - 1
Wednesday - 2
Thursday - 3

The closer it is to the Hour of Judgment, the more likely it is that the Number Ones will be the ones coming forward.

The Mission To Stop The Hour Of Judgment

[[JASON'S IMAGE #5 GOES HERE]]

"each generation, arises your rue
in the days of judgment, fate comes for you
if you wish to survive this time and thrive
find four secrets, watch for each clue

"first, who it is must be found
second, to call him like a hound
third, to weaken and surround
fourth, to make his death knell sound

"this be done, before Friday noon
else destiny and final doom"

In the Neighborhood, it's sung in lullabies. It's written in homes and on doors, for luck, and tagged on buildings, as a threat. It's the prophecy of the Cold God. Some mock it, some revere it, some ignore it, but almost everyone has heard it, and knows what it purports to mean.

And now that the Cold God walks the streets, that meaning holds out the only hope.

This has happened before. When the Cold God arrives, people get what's coming to them -- which can be "what they deserve" or not. It is not fair, it is not just -- it's cold, and that's fate.

Some among the gangs, cops, private operators, civilians and clergy think the Cold God is THE God, that the tough reality of life on the streets is his harsh, divine plan. Others think the Cold God is the Devil -- merciless, unforgiving, and cruel.

The junkies are overdosing, the rival gangs are murdering each other, criminals are being arrested, the innocents with connections to bad people are getting burned. It's going to continue until each and every person in the Neighborhood gets theirs.

THE PLAYER CHARACTERS' ROLE

The PCs grew up together. They chose separate paths as they grew up, splitting off into the Neighborhood's four competitive Sections. However, unique to the Neighborhood, they maintained a close friendship and trust despite their different walks. That bond has been a great boon to them, allowing them to pool the resources that each PC gets from their Section, affording them the most well-rounded information in the Neighborhood. [[JASON'S IMAGE #1 GOES HERE]]

Now, you all see the Judgment has begun, and none of you want to meet your Fates quietly. Whether you're happy with your life or miserable, proud of your Image or ashamed, you're not ready to get the verdict just yet. Maybe you don't like feeling judged, or you want time to change your life, or the Cold God just pisses you off; whichever, it's time to take him out.

The Cold God is a supernatural being, so that's easier said than done. It's said that he walks the streets in human form, but bullets don't harm him, and he can vanish and appear at will. He can fly, he can walk through walls, he can move at blinding speed, he can control minds. You've heard it all, though nothing's been proven.

There really is no better guide than the prophecy, so the four of you have decided to go for it, to seek the ways to identify, summon, neutralize, and kill the Cold God. It's become clear that the best way to do that is to instruct your web of connections to give you reports on any strange goings-on in the Neighborhood -- actions of the Cold God that reveal something more than just "he brings people to their fates."

Conference Scene

At your first Conference Scene, the players come up with their Conference Spot. This is a spot where they have enough privacy to talk freely among themselves, as well as a spot where the Neighborhood's messengers know to find them.

Each Conference Scene begins with either (a) the arrival of a messenger, or (b) the GM's statement, "No messenger since your last Conflict."

At the beginning of a Conference Scene, messengers bring Reports, Bad News, and Good News. Later in a Conference Scene, messengers deliver your Inquiries and return with Offers.

A messenger is an unaffiliated non-Civilian, someone with a blend of Images and no specific allegiance, who is valued for precisely that reason. You can trust the info he brings you, and you can also trust that he will carry your own messages faithfully. [[JASON'S IMAGE #4 GOES HERE]]

This is the only use you can get out of a messenger. You can interrogate, threaten, seduce, or kill them if you feel it's character-appropriate, but none of that will accomplish anything.

REPORTS

You get four Reports, all on Monday. Two come in your first Conference Scene, and one each in your second and third Conference scenes. That's it for the game. These four Reports are the information that can lead you to the Cold God.

The messenger will deliver, unprompted, all the most-obviously-relevant details of each situation he Reports on, but the PCs can certainly ask further questions to spark the GM's creativity.

BAD NEWS

Any time a PC's Benefactor or Dependent might be kidnapped, killed, alienated, or swear you off, the GM rolls and them immediately has a messenger deliver the news if there is any.

GOOD NEWS

Any time a PC has become a Number One thanks to their previous Conflict, a messenger confirms this in the subsequent Conference Scene.

INQUIRIES

Once you've formed a theory you want to test, you send out an Inquiry.

OFFERS

The GM rolls on his list of NPCs to see which one responds to your Inquiry. The NPC who responds will send a messenger back with his Offer to meet and discuss your theory. This will be the only NPC who will ever offer to test this particular theory (and, this NPC will never offer to test a different theory). This

isn't necessarily because no one else knows, but because the NPC in question is at the top of the food chain among those who do -- if he wants to handle it, no one will risk his ire by dealing around him.

FORMING THEORIES AND PICKING ONE

After the GM has portrayed the messenger (or said "No messenger"), the PCs discuss what they've learned, and share any new theories that have occurred to them.

Once all the theories are on the table, the PCs decide which one to test next.

They can dictate their Inquiry to the messenger, or skip that step, according to taste.

The GM then rolls on his list to see which NPC will respond with an Offer. After that, he picks (or rolls for) that NPC's Weakness and Resistance. The Conference Scene then "cuts" forward in time to when the messenger returns later in the day with the Offer.

Again, this conversation can be roleplayed, or the GM can just identify which NPC made the Offer and whose turf they want to meet on, according to taste.

The GM should pick the NPC's turf if he has an interesting scene in mind, and use the PCs' Conference Spot otherwise.

Once you have this info, it's time to plan for the Conflict Scene.

PLANNING

You'll probably want to note your opponent's Section and thus Method, guess at their Weakness and Resistance, factor in their approximate Image rank, discuss what the individual PCs want to do with their Images (gain, lose, switch, etc.), and form a plan.

This plan could be, "We're not ready to deal with this person, let's send out another Inquiry and see who responds to that." The only limit on the number of Inquiries you can send out between Conflict Scenes is that you can't test any theories which compete with each other (i.e. proving one would disprove or obviate another).

Once you've picked your next Conflict, the amount of prep is up to you. At the very least, you should pick which PC will take the first turn, and what Method they'll use.

Conflict Scenes: Resolution

A Conflict Scene starts with the GM describing the opponent, as well as the meeting spot if it isn't the PCs' Conference Spot. Then the PCs take their first turn and the Conflict begins.

Each Conflict has two sides. One side is all four PCs. The other side is the individual NPC opponent who can prove or disprove the PCs' theory. They may have many minions present, but these will not help them in the Conflict. Rather, minions will react to the Conflict in much the same way as the Neighborhood will, alter, when they hear what happened.

At the beginning of each Conflict, the PC group gets a pile of Conflict Tokens equal to the highest individual Image in the group. These tokens can be dice, chips, or just marks on a sheet of paper; all that matters is that you know when you run out. The opposing NPC likewise gets Image tokens equal to their image.

Conflicts occur in numbered turns. Within each turn, the players go first, and the opponent goes second. This ends when one side runs out of tokens. You cannot end a Conflict before this has occurred.

Each turn, one PC must be designated as active, and that PC speaks or takes some action. For a PC to be active, their Image must be higher than or equal to the turn number.

In a turn when multiple PCs COULD act, it is up to the players to come to a consensus about which PC actually acts. There are some strategic elements to this, which players will likely wish to discuss at the end of the preceding Conference Scene. For managing PC Images, these include whether the players expect to win or lose, and in what round, and which PCs want more or less Image than they currently have. As far as simply winning the Conflict, the most important element is how to approach the opponent's Weaknesses and Resistances.

WEAKNESSES AND RESISTANCES

Each opponent is uniquely responsive to the four Methods, having a Weakness and a Resistance. Both of these are always outside of the opponent's own Method.

The PCs' ability to take advantage of a Weakness depends on when they employ the appropriate Method. Timing doesn't matter in terms of turn number, it matters in terms of Method number. That is, which Method did the PCs try first, second, etc.?

If you hit an opponent's Weakness with your first Method, you decrease their Image tokens for the conflict by 2.

If you hit an opponent's Weakness with your second Method, you decrease their Image pool for the conflict by 1.

If you hit an opponent's Weakness with your 3rd or 4th Method, it's too late, and you get no benefit.

A Resistance is different; it is not timing-dependent. If you use the Method that triggers an opponent's Resistance at ANY point, you increase their Image tokens for the Conflict by 2.

The players will always know when they have hit an opponent's Weakness or Resistance. The GM will say, "Suddenly, their demeanor changes." GM, do this even if it is the first turn of the Conflict. The description of the change in demeanor should make it clear whether you've hit a Resistance (the opponent gets more obstinate and confident) or a Weakness (they start backing down).

SWITCHING METHODS

Each PC can choose to use a Method other than the Method that goes with their Primary Image. This may often be a good idea, to try to find a Weakness, or to avoid hitting a Resistance. However, acting against your Primary Image changes the points you may earn or lose in the Conflict, as well as what Image those points affect. See the "Off-Method" notes in Outcomes below.

OUTCOMES

1) **If the PCs' opponent runs out of Image tokens first**, then on the players' next turn, the GM waits until they have picked an acting PC and a Method. As soon as the player begins his character's speech / action, the GM interrupts with, "You can see he's got nothing left." The acting player may then narrate how he gets the desired info out of the opponent in any way appropriate to the chosen Method.

The opponent then tells the PCs if their theory is correct or incorrect. If it is incorrect, the opponent also offers a Hint that will help them refine their theory. The Conflict Scene is over.

> The opponent loses 1 Image (probably irrelevant, but you never know).

> The PC who took the final action in the Conflict earns 1 point in his Primary Image.

> (Off-Method: That PC loses 1 point in his Primary Image and gains 2 points in the Image of their Method used.)

> (Off-Method: Any other PC who acted off-method during the Conflict lose 1 point in their Primary Image and gains 1 in the Image of their Method used.)

2) **If the PCs spend their last Image token, and then their opponent responds**, they have three choices: Walk Away, Give In, or Go For Broke.

> ### WALKING AWAY

> This simply means admitting you've lost. The Conflict Scene is Over.

> The opponent gains 1 Image (so next time they'll be tougher).

> Any PC who participated in the Conflict loses 1 Image.

> (Off-Method: Any PC who participated in the Conflict loses 2 Image.)

> ### GIVING IN

> This means admitting you've lost and then doing whatever your opponent wants. Only the PC who took the players' final turn can Give In. The opponent, after achieving satisfaction, will then

tell the PCs if their theory is correct or incorrect. If it is incorrect, the opponent also offers a Hint that will help them refine their theory. The Conflict Scene is over.

The opponent gains 2 Image.

The PC who Gave In loses 3 Image.

(Off-Method: The PC who Gave In loses 4 Image.)

For other PCs, the results are the same as in Walking Away.

GOING FOR BROKE

Because the players act first in each turn, that means they never know if they're tied. Once they spend their last token, and the opponent spends a token, they don't know if he has any more left. The only way to find out is to Go For Broke.

1) If your opponent's all out, you win the Conflict. Same as in Outcome #1 above, but you gain an extra point in the Image whose Method you used in Going For Broke. You just impressed the Neighborhood with your fearlessness.

2) If your opponent has one or more Image points left, your reckless action immediately leads you to your Fate. The player gets to narrate how his character dies, including narrating actions for all present NPCs.

That's not necessarily the end of the story, though. Dying when you Go For Broke adds two to your Image score post-mortem (for the Image of the Method used). If this new score is higher than the opponent's total number of Image tokens (adjusted for triggered Weaknesses and Resistances, but not for number of turns elapsed), the PC group wins the Conflict! In the aftermath of the death, the shaken opponent tells the PCs if their theory is correct or incorrect. If it is incorrect, the opponent also offers a Hint that will help them refine their theory. The Conflict Scene is over.

The opponent loses 1 point of Image.

(Off-Method: Any surviving PC who acted off-method during the Conflict loses 1 point in their Primary Image and gains 1 in the Image of their Method used.)

If the dead PC's new Image score isn't high enough to win, then see Walking Away above for Image outcomes.

Conflict Scenes: Speech and Action

Once you've decided to take the group's turn, and picked a Method, and delivered any fitting Narration (see Narration), what should you do with your character?

The most important thing is that you portray the Method in question. It doesn't have to be in an extreme form, but it has to be generally on-target. Charm and Violence needn't mean sex and murder; flattery and threats are just fine. Plain old reason, however, is not. A Conflict is a battle of Images, not a contest in logic! You will never ever change an opponent's mind by convincing them they ought to help you, you will only wear them down by being more fanatically devoted to your Image than they are to theirs.

Beyond that, as the turns of a Conflict progress, you should endeavor to:

a) Escalate! More tension, more emotion, more extreme speech and action!

b) Drive toward your fate! Remember, if you wind up deciding to Go For Broke, you could meet your Fate in this very scene! if so, it shouldn't come out of nowhere. You earned it.

For very long Conflicts, here's a rough guideline to help inspire players who may feel themselves running out of things for their characters to say. The numbers at left are turn numbers.

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 1 - I want some info.
 2 - Here's why you should give it to me.
 3 - Here's why you should really, REALLY care about my previous reason.
 4 - Here's ANOTHER reason to / consequence of not complying.
 5 - Just do it, fool.
 6 - You are wrong for not complying.
 7 - I will go far to get what I want.
 8 - (initiate your Fate with announcement or illustration)
 9 - (begin your Fate with an action)
10 - (complete your Fate -- you're Going For Broke, and might die)
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The back-and-forth of successive turns can be long, slow, and nuanced, or it can go like lightning. Here's a one-on-one between a Moralizing PC and an Angler opponent:

I think you should give us the info.
-What's in it for me?
The fate of the Neighborhood.
-Anything else?
Do the right thing.
-Make it worth my while.
The Neighborhood needs you.
-Then it can pay me.
A good man would share.
-A smart man would deal.
I'll do anything for the Neighborhood!
-I'll do anything for the right price.
I'll cut myself.
-That's poor negotiating.
(Makes small cut)

-Your generous offer of blood doesn't do it for me.
(Places knife over artery) Do you want my death on your conscience?
-Do you want to can the theatrics and talk deal?

Boom, 9 turns, 1 minute. Not that every game's Neighborhood should be 1940s Los Angeles...

The Secrets of the Cold God

The GM must produce the four Secrets that the PCs will try to uncover in their quest to stop the Cold God. This is a step-by-step process that is vital to repeated play. If you're playing Be Real for the first time, you can skip this process and use the four Secrets below (PLAYERS - DON'T READ!):

SECRET ONE

The Report:
A small house was utterly demolished by explosions. The house was located in a rare area of the Neighborhood that no section claimed. No one cared about the place, no one had a point to make or anything to gain by destroying it. The sole occupant of the building was Darren Cobb, a candle-maker who peddled his creations from a sidewalk stand in front of his house. The destruction of the explosion was such that it will take a week to sift the rubble and find whether Cobb's body is somewhere among it. Police and firefighters have no clue what caused the explosion, and have never seen anything like it. At another time, this would be a mystery, but in these Days of Judgment, it is clearly the work of the Cold God.

The Question:
Why did the Cold God destroy this house?

Plausible Theories:
- to destroy some item that could defeat him
- to destroy a building that could contain him
- to hide some fact that could identify him
- to kill Cobb, who knew how to summon him

The Answer:
Cobb himself has been possessed by the Cold God. Cobb's physical description can be had for free, so once the players know the deal, they'll know how to spot him.

Hints (to be gotten when disproving other theories):
- Cobb was seen acting weird before explosion
- someone who had robbed Cobb's place reported that Cobb owned nothing special

SECRET TWO

The Report:
Amidst the rampant deaths in the Neighborhood, the people have noticed some islands of safety: churches. All of the large Catholic churches in the Neighborhood have stayed death-free thus far during the Days of Judgment, as have the buildings adjacent to them, with one exception.

The Question:
Why doesn't the Cold God kill people in or near large Catholic churches?

Plausible Theories:
- the Cold God has possessed a clergyman, and doesn't want to draw attention to himself

- the Cold God is powerless on sacred ground
- churches contain something (holy water? crosses?) that could be used to kill him
- churches contain something (bells?) that could be used to draw him out

The Answer:
The smoke from the sacred herbs burned in church censers befogs the Cold God and takes away his superhuman speed.

Hints:
- churches have been observed at bell-ringing, with no unusual activity spotted
- clergymen have been observed, all acting as normal

SECRET THREE

The Report:
Card player William "Slick Willie" Feguson died suddenly and strangely, in the gambling den adjacent to All Saints Church. He collapsed while clearing his winnings from a poker table, and people first suspected a heart attack (though a covert stabbing seemed plausible in the busy, crowded room). On inspecting the body, they found a playing card (an ace) lodged in his severed spine, and three more aces up his sleeve. Willie had long been a suspected cheater, and there were any number of people who might have wanted him dead, but the supernatural manner of his death clearly revealed the hand of the Cold God. The weird part is that no one else at the club died that night; the Cold God usually takes his toll en masse.

The Question:
Why did the Cold God kill Slick Willie specifically?

Plausible Theories:
- Willie could identify him
- Willie knew how to (or had an object that would) kill or neutralize him
- Willie did something that would summon him

The Answer:
The Cold God is compulsively drawn to those who cheat at games of chance, arriving to kill them even at the risk of his own safety.

Hints:
- Willie's body had no special objects or info on it
- this was a particularly well-policed club; Willie was likely the only cheater there

SECRET FOUR

The Report:
The Days of Judgment had begun in earnest, the streets ran red with blood, the air was thick with sirens and gunfire... and then the storm came, and it stopped. As the Neighborhood was drenched with water, blasted with lightning, and shaken by thunder, the deaths stopped. Life returned to normal. But only until the worst of the storm was over.

The Question:
Why did the Cold God stop his killings during a thunderstorm?

Plausible Theories:
- he's vulnerable to lightning, water, or loud sounds
- he's invisible, downpour reveals him
- strong winds counter his movement
- thunderstorm calls him to specific place, away from killing

The Answer:
The Cold God can be killed by electricity. In fact, he can ONLY be killed by electricity.

Hints:
- he's killed in loud places (factories) and wet places (sewers)
- most survivors of massacres have reported seeing a humanoid figure

THE METHOD FOR BUILDING SECRETS

Start with the four Means that the players need: ways to bring the Cold God to a certain location, identify him when he arrives, neutralize his powers, and kill him. **For each Means:**

1) Phrase the Means to yourself as a question. Example: "How can the PCs kill the Cold God?"

2) Make up an Answer. Example: "With electricity."

3) Make up an Action the Cold God did that suggests, but does not prove, this Answer. This action must be noteworthy. It must be identifiable as the work of the Cold God, and it must be out-of-character for the Cold God in some way. Ultimately, it must beg the question, "Why did the Cold God do that?" Example: well, if electricity can kill him, let's say, "There was a thunderstorm, and he was afraid to go out into it, so the deaths stopped until the lightning passed."

4) Test your Action to see if it's a good Clue. If it doesn't point to the answer at all, it's a bad Clue. If it points too obviously to the Answer, it's a bad Clue. You can test this later by quickly brainstorming other Plausible Theories. Remember, the players know what Means they're looking for, so brainstorm along those lines. If your brainstorm sputters on "identify him", "neutralize him", and "summon him", and keeps jumping immediately to "kill him; duh," then your Action is too obvious a clue. Try again. Often, you can turn an action into a better Clue simply by fleshing out some details in a provocative way.

5) Once you're satisfied that you have a good Clue, flesh out any more details you need to convey it, and turn it into the Report that the PCs will get from the Neighborhood information network.

6) With your list of Plausible Theories in front of you, think of additional Hints that might help the players choose the right Answer from among them. If you cna come up with two hints, great. If you can't come up with any, there's no need to do it just yet; you can wait until the players actually form a theory. Just make sure you've decided on a Hint by the time they enter a Conflict to test their theory!

GM RULES ON ARBITRATING SECRET-FINDING

1) Three Hints on any one Secret gets the players the Secret. That is, if the players win their third Conflict testing their third theory on a given Secret, the Hint they get out of it will make the Secret quite obvious. Note that "quite obvious" is not the same as "proven", and the players may still want to throw their fourth theory out there to see who comes forward to prove/disprove it.

2) If the players test a theory that's off by just a teeny tiny bit, and they win the Conflict, DO NOT have their opponent say, "Wrong!" Have the opponent say, "Correct, but with this minor change," and share. Or, have the opponent say "Correct!" and then change the particulars of the Secret you originally wrote.

   Example: If you planned for the Cold God to be Impaired by a pentagram drawn in blood, and the players test a theory that he can be Impaired by a pentagram, you should either ditch the blood requirement or give it them for free. (Unless you handed them "pentagram" from the get-go, and the WHOLE POINT was to deduce "what kind of pentagram?" That would be VERY different.)

3) If you really are stuck on a tough, borderline judgment call regarding point #2 above, here's the tiebreaker: don't help on Monday and Tuesday, do help on Wednesday and Thursday.

Narrations

The purpose of a Narration is to flesh out your character's life, past, desires, and concerns.

A Narration is something that goes through the character's head, but that the character does NOT speak aloud. The PLAYER speaks it aloud (in his character's voice or not, according to taste) for the benefit of the other players.

A Narration is a thought, inspired by the tension and stakes of the Conflict, expressing how and why he cares about the outcome. Usually, the outcome at issue will simply be the entire Days of Judgment situation, the mission to find and kill the Cold God; but if you can think of a way to tie your concerns to the specific Conflict occurring, that's even better!

Narrations are called for at specific points during a Conflict.

When the time comes for you to do a narration, you have two choices of narration type, and three choices of narration subject. The types are Prayer and Flashback, and the subjects are your Dependent, your Benefactor, and your Image.

In addition, there are special Fate and Dilemma narrations.

FLASHBACKS

A Dependent Flashback describes a meaningful moment or period in the course of your relationship with your Dependent. It should strengthen your sense that your Dependent matters to your character. "Something that brought us closer together," is a perfect Flashback.

A Benefactor Flashback is exactly the same, but strengthening your sense of your character's connection with his/her Benefactor.

An Image Flashback describes a meaningful moment or period in the evolution of your Image. The Image in question must be your current Primary Image. There are two types of Image Flashbacks.

Positive Image Flashback: If you are using the Method of your Primary Image, then your Flashback should describe a time when you bolstered that Image by doing something that you still feel good about.

Negative Image Flashback: If you are using a Method different from your Primary Image, then your Flashback should describe a time you either (a) bolstered that Image by doing something that you feel bad about, or (b) weakened that Image by doing something that you feel good about.
[[JASON'S IMAGE #3 GOES HERE]]

PRAYERS

"Prayer" can be taken however the player wants, provided that the statement voices a hope and identifies an addressee. So it could range from, "Lord Jesus, see me through this trial," to, "C'mon, big ol' gun, make these punks shit their pants!" All prayers should make it clear why you want what you want.

A Dependent Prayer voices a hope or desire relating to your Dependent. It could be a prayer for their safety, or for you to make them proud, or anything else that strengthens your sense of your relationship.

A Benefactor Prayer is exactly the same, but strengthening your sense of your character's connection with his/her Benefactor.

A Positive Image Prayer voices a desire to strengthen your current Primary Image. Only choose this Narration if you are committed to strengthening this image. It may be fun to use this for dramatic effect late in a Conflict, but be sure not to imply a priority you don't actually have!

A Negative Image Prayer voices a desire to erode your current Primary Image. Same advice from Positive Image Prayer applies.

PICKING A NARRATION

How do you choose between the eight options? Well, primarily, you choose according to your inspiration at that moment! There's no "wrong" pattern to picking. Variety can keep things stimulating, or returning to address the same relationships can give them welcome depth.

If you decide to go with a lot of the same type of Prayers, just be sure to distinguish them from each other. Repeating the exact same thing many times adds less to your exploration of the characters.

WHEN TO NARRATE

Whenever it is your turn to spend an Image Token in a Conflict, you have the OPTION to Narrate immediately BEFORE spending the token and describing your character's action/speech (so, AFTER it's agreed that you will take this turn).

On your FIRST turn to spend an Image Token in a Conflict, you MUST Narrate immediately BEFORE spending the token. This rule holds true regardless of how many turns of a Conflict have passed before you enter it.

On the turn when the group's LAST Image Token will be spent, the player spending that token MUST Narrate just BEFORE spending the token.

Whenever the group runs out of Tokens without winning the Conflict, BEFORE the players decide whether to Go For Broke, Give In, or Walk Away, the player whose character will be risked has the OPTION to do a Dilemma Narration.

When you decide to Go For Broke, you have the OPTION to Narrate immediately BEFORE describing your character's action/speech. Then, immediately AFTER describing your character's action/speech, you MUST do a Fate Narration.

FATE & DILEMMA NARRATIONS

A Fate Narration describes how the character feels about meeting his/her Fate here and now, should that come to pass. It's not a time to say, "I hope I don't die!" Rather, it's a time to say, "If I die like this, . . ."

A Dilemma Narration is made when you want to really stew over a tough decision. "Is learning this clue worth making myself look like a sucker and losing the respect of the Neighborhood?" "Do I risk it all right now to win this Conflict, or do I take the loss to live another day?" What goes through your character's mind when faced with that choice? If a compelling portrayal occurs to you, go ahead and Narrate it!

Final Scene: Did You Uncover the Four Secrets?

Once Thursday ends, the PC group will be in one of three situations:

1) They **know** they can stop the Cold God. They have four theories confirmed via Conflicts. Go straight to the **Storytelling Scene**.

2) They don't even have any theories they want to try against the Cold God. They give up, and accept that they will meet their fates at Friday noon. Go to the **Judgment Scene**.

3) They have some theories that they figure are worth taking a shot with. They won't know whether it'll work until they try. See **Taking Your Best Shot** below.

TAKING YOUR BEST SHOT

The players must choose the specifics of their plan, stating how they will identify, summon, contain, and kill the Cold God. Legend has it that any attempt to kill the Cold God may only succeed if it is accompanied by a prayer, so the players must also offer one (this can be done by any number of players). The prayer won't work if you make a bunch of different ones, or if you try to hedge your bets by including conditions in the prayer. "Let us know (identity) when we see him, let him come when we call him with (summoning), let (container) contain him, and let (weapon) kill him, amen," is pretty much all that's allowed in terms of content. Of course, you can add as much pathos and personality as you want.

Now it's up to the GM to tell you if it worked!

The GM compares the players' four guesses to the four actual Secrets. What happens then depends on how they match up.

1) **If the players guessed right on all counts**, the GM says "Congratulations!" and the group proceeds to the Storytelling Scene.

2) **If the "summon" fails**, the GM says, "Noon comes, and the Cold God hasn't showed up." Proceed to the Judgment Scene.

3) **If the "summon" succeeds, but "identify" fails**, the GM says, "Noon comes, and the Cold God hasn't showed up." Proceed to the Judgment Scene. Any PC who meets his Fate in the spot of the summoning sees the Cold God there with him as he dies, invisible or unnoticed until now.

4) **If "summon" and "identify" both succeed**, then the PCs come face to face with the Cold God. The way this encounter will go down is determined by which of "contain" and "kill" failed. See **The Encounter** below. The Encounter ends with the PCs looking into the Cold God's eyes and seeing their Fates unfold. Proceed to the Judgment Scene. At the end of the last player's Judgment narration, the GM describes the PCs' bodies lying in the place where they met the Cold God, as the Cold God departs to begin the Hour of Judgment.

The Encounter

1) **If "contain" fails but "kill" would succeed:** before the PCs can even register his presence, the Cold God moves at superhuman speed to disable the means of killing him. Then they get a good look at him, and he transfixes them with his stare.

2) **If "contain" succeeds but "kill" fails:** the Cold God arrives, and visibly swoons when encountering the containment. The adverse effects obviously begin to wear off quite quickly, giving the PCs just enough time to use their method to try to kill him. The instant this doesn't work, he finishes shaking off the container effect, and transfixes the PCs with his stare.

3) **If "contain" and "kill" both fail:** the Cold God cavalierly shows himself, and transfixes the PCs with his stare.

JUDGMENT SCENE (If You Didn't Uncover the Four Secrets)

The GM narrates the Neighborhood mayhem of the Hour of Judgment, wherein almost all in the Sections of the Neighborhood meet their Fates.

1) **Any PCs with zero Image** are Civilians, and can survive the carnage by hiding until it's over. Players of such PCs will then have the option to narrate their characters to good stopping points. See the final section in this book.

2) **Any PCs who are Number Ones** hear the Voice of the Cold God, telling them that they have chosen their own Fates so surely that he need not enforce them now. Players of such PCs must then narrate how they meet their Fates days, months, or years later.

3) **Any PCs who are neither Civilians nor Number Ones** meet their Fates during the Hour of Judgment. Players of such PCs go first in narrating specifically how their characters meet their Fates.

STORYTELLING SCENE (If You Uncovered the Four Secrets)

Before Thursday's end, you figured out how to stop the Cold God.

Now it is Friday noon. All the people of the Neighborhood have hidden in their homes to try to avoid whatever Fates might be in store for them. Noon passes. Nothing happens. Word begins to circulate that the Cold God has been killed. Is it really true? Who was responsible? People flock to the site of the Cold God's supposed death, seeking answers. Everyone who is anyone is there, including all the NPC who have been the PCs' opponents, and all the Sections' Number Ones.

They all want to know what happened. So you tell them.

Speaking For Effect

You have the spotlight, so how do you want to use it? Will one PC claim to have killed the Cold God single-handedly with his fists, to jack his Image way up? Will another PC sobbingly admit doing something that breaks his Image, to shed points?

The players describe the final confrontation, from beginning to end. Whoever wants to start starts, and everyone speaks up when they see fit. There is one rule to this: you CANNOT dictate what another player's character did. That means that the only thing you can say about someone else's character is an affirmation of their prior statement.

Before launching into this character speech, the players will want to discuss what's important to them. This can be anything from storytelling ("I wanna describe how we used the herb censer!") to events ("I wanna be the one who delivered the death blow!") to Image goals ("I'm gonna make myself look like a total coward, back me up.") You can spend a long time meticulously crafting your tale, or you can plan nothing and enjoy a good ad-lib -- whatever the group prefers.

At the end of your story, each player announces how many Image points they lose or gain, with the maximum in either direction being two. Killing the Cold God can change the Neighborhood's impression of who you are in important ways, but it can't re-write everything you've done to get there.

Recounting the Cold God Himself

The whole group should decide who's going to determine how the Cold God looked, spoke, acted, died, etc. I can be fun to let the GM handle this, or it can be fun to let the players decide everything in the moment of character narration.

Are We Telling the Truth?

You're telling what you want the Neighborhood to hear. If that clashes with your vision of what actually happened, tell the other players as much! Just signal them so they know when you're speaking in-character and when you're not. One easy way is to just say "aside" before you switch from oration to factual account, and "resume" in the other direction:

"I called him a bitch and he cowered in my shadow! Aside: actually, I was too focused on the plan to do any name-calling; and he just looked crazed, not scared. Resume: I think he might have crapped his pants when I reached for the outlet!"

Is the Game Over After the Storytelling?

The Neighborhood believes you (GM may portray this during the storytelling if desired), and your Images change as chosen. If those changes produce any consequences, the GM will advise the players of them. With this final information in their hands, the players can choose whether to follow up their storytelling with additional "and here's what my character will be doing next" or not, as they see fit.

Maybe a player wants their Dependent to rush out of the crowd and embrace them, that's golden. (The presence of each character's Dependent and Benefactor at the scene of the storytelling is up to that character's player.)

Maybe a player wants to narrate how now that he's Number One, he's gonna make a plan to move into the pimped-out place of that jerk who opposed him on Monday.

Maybe a player wants his character to die alone, wallowing in guilt.

Pick whatever you feel is a good stopping point. Sometimes, the storytelling itself will do that just fine.

NOTES: Mechanics I didn't have time to evaluate:

GETTING JUMPED
(in 1st-3rd (roll) Conf Scene after become Number One)

GRUDGES
each time you win a conflict vs someone (or for each point of image you spend? or each time you cost them image?), they get Grudge points. if their Grudge ever becomes greater than your Image, they come after you by attacking (as per their Method) your Dependent or Benefactor. GM rolls to see whether attack successful; PC only gets news afterward.

PC ACTIONS BRING HOUR OF JUDGMENT CLOSER
every time you use your image, you get closer to being judged?
every time you gain image, you get closer to being judged?
- party - be careful about who you bump when, because each bump gets Judgment Day points
randomizing element outisde characters, so Judgment Day not exactly predictable?

INTER-PC CONFLICTS
just roleplay Methods. but don't break the party.
or, can violate Image to do what you really want? provides counterpoint to the way you act when folks are watching?