

IN YOUR OWN SKIN

a fantasy game about fitting in



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4-6 players

~2-4 sessions of ~3hrs

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-Chapter One:

You're a pack of friends. It's the day before your big journey, your last day of school. You're going through your usual routine, but there's a lot on your minds. You're about to leave behind everything you've known, including your adolescence. When you come back from your trip, you'll be adults, ready to claim your niches in society. You'll have chosen who you really are, and who you will be for the rest of your lives. At least, that's the plan.

-One player is the GM. The GM makes a list of places (see after Making a character). Each other player makes a character (PC for short).

Making a character means defining:

Any time before Step 4:

Name

Appearance

Step 1:

List of life facts

- house/apt
- entertainments
- job
- projects/hobbies/sports
- significant other (optional)
- pet(s) (optional)

Step 2:

Love about your current life

Hate about your current life

Feel about family

Step 3:

3 Adjectives (ADJs) that best describe your personality

Every ADJ in this game has two

measures: Socialized and Egocentric.

Give each of your 3 one point in either measure. You cannot have all 3

Socialized or all 3 Egocentric.

"Socialized" means that it plays well with others. This can mean anything from saving lives to being mildly entertaining.

"Egocentric" means that it's often at odds with human interaction. This can mean anything from slightly inconveniencing others to hurting them.

Neither of these are abstract definitions of the ADJs; rather, they're accounts of how

these ADJs tend to manifest in this PC's life. You might be ineffectually, disruptively complimentary (Kind with a point in Egocentric) or hilariously crass (Rude with a point in Socialized).

Step 4:

Describe to the group what you look like and a few things you characteristically do. Try to avoid broad "what I'm like" adjectives as much as you can. Definitely don't say verbatim the three ADJs you wrote down. The other players' impressions of you should be largely their own. Your portrayal of your character is more important than your initial vision; feel free to edit your 3 ADJs at any point if you feel they no longer match your own concept.

Step 5:

Agree on the relationship between each pair of PCs. This can be described in one word or many.

Step 6:

Write down one positive and one negative facet of your relationship with each PC. These don't have to be opinions of them, but should at least reflect some part of how you feel about them some times.

For the GM, **making a list of places** means:

First, a constraint: these places will not have any people in them when you use them in play. So, don't use places wherein people are a key feature. It's easiest to just use secluded places.

List places you'd like to go on a trip. Include key features that make you want to go there.

Think of places from your real life that you had strong emotional reactions to. **List those**, including striking **features** and/or features tied to your emotions. If you can name the **emotion**, note that as well.

Work on this until you have at least **20 places**.

Then, go through each item and brainstorm a **magnified version** of it. If you get stumped, move on to the next one. The more the better. If you think you can improvise more during play, you can start with only 4. If you might not be able to improvise, start with **at least 10**.

These magnified places are your **Edges**.

-You'll be going to some strange places on the edges of reality. You'll be given a vehicle and enough bananas, protein bars, and gallon water jugs to last the trip. What else do you want to bring? What do you want to do in the last day of your familiar life? Once you return from your journey, you can still see the same places and people, but they'll be dealing with a new you.

-PC players **take turns setting scenes** based on what their PC will do.

Roleplay stuff the **full pack** of PCs does together.

Summarize stuff any PC does **alone**.

The GM **supports the players' visions** when asked, by portraying NPCs.

Go around the table until everyone feels they have **a feel for the PCs' group vibe**. Once that's been achieved, it's time to jump ahead to the journey.

-Chapter Two:

It's early morning, and you're awake. It's the day of your rite of passage (R.O.P.) journey. The Edges you travel to will allow you to change into who you want to be. So who is that?

-Come up with **3 new ADJs**. These should describe your ideal social niche, and hint at what sort of job you might be suited for. Pick ADJs that could be inherent, not ones that depend on outside factors.

Then pick one **Desire** the PC has that conflicts with this ideal self.

Players should not see each other's ADJs and Desires, but they can be revealed in character at any time.

-You need to start acting like the person you want to be ASAP! Your friends need to see the new you before they try to push you in a direction you don't like.

-The GM writes down each player's set of aspiring ADJs. The GM then comes up with an **animal** for each set. Best is if the animal is familiar and will be obvious why it's a match. Failing that, supernatural animals of legend are an option. If you can't think of any matches, invent an animal, complete with what it looks like.

Map each ADJ with a **Physical Feature** of the animal. If logical matches occur to you, use those; otherwise, random assignment is fine.

Looking over the ADJs, invent ways to test some of those qualities. The more the better, but one **Test** per player is sufficient.

The GM also writes down each player's Desire.

The GM creates one **Gift** that might satisfy the Desire, and one **Gift** that might satisfy the ideal self concept.

Example Gifts:

- new ability
- new useful item
- new name or status marker
- new body (hell, why not?)
- lotsa money
- secrets about self, other PCs, relatives, govt, culture, world, afterlife
- appealing location to settle in
- enticing (immediately compatible) romantic partner
- job offer (could be mundane, lucrative profession; or could be lifelong quest w/ sponsor)
- finite awesome experience with transformative potential (religious ritual, magical projection, insight, knowledge... maybe even just skydiving)

-Now you're in the car. You're driving on a street that's always blocked off except for these rite of passage (R.O.P.) journeys. The way the street winds and turns, you should be surrounded by familiar sights. But you're not. This is neither your city nor the suburbs or towns that surround it. The fields and buildings look normal, but there are no intersecting streets, no names on anything, and no people.

Maybe this has something to do with potent smell of herbs coming from your car. Maybe

it's related to the tiny computer you've been given, whose screen shows only a constantly changing route from "You are here" to "Home". Maybe your brains were altered by the farewell roots or the ritual tea.

-Make a list of Necessities on a piece of scrap paper. The number of these must be at least equal to the number of PCs.

Start with these, and add on if needed:

- car
- map
- sustenance (can be broken into food and water if you want)

Do **not** list supplies for the Pack Moot ritual. These will never be requested or threatened.

In order **to return home** from the Edges, the PCs need each Necessity or an ADJ or Gift that can substitute for it.

For example, Hunting-Wise could feed you if you lost your sustenance, Direction-Wise could guide you if you lost your map, and an Amulet of Edge-Shifting could allow you back into reality without your car.

-Then the scenery changes. You're barely an hour into your journey, but you're seeing some signs of a different climate and terrain entirely. You know this is nowhere near your

city. The road (or roads) comes and goes, alternating with terrain that is driveable in all directions. You must have entered the field of Edges.

The Edges are the places where two realities meet: your world, and the world of the Strangers. The Edges can look, sound, and smell like virtually anything. Most are striking, possessed of a potent mood that calls out to ROP packs.

The pack members may show new sides of themselves in this strange situation. What are your best friends like now that you're all removed from your familiar patterns? What are you like?

-Players **interact in character**. Form a sense of where your character's at, mentally, and express that. Talk about whatever seems natural in this situation.

The GM should describe each Edge **manifesting more fully** as the PCs drive. Add new details during **pauses** in the PCs' conversations.

Once the GM's out of description for a given Edge, he says, "The [primary

characteristic of the Edge] **begins to fade.**" This is "**last call**" for any player who hadn't yet gotten around to expressing their interest in the Edge. If no one's interested, the GM should start working in a brand new Edge.

-Which Edges will one or more of you react to with strong like or dislike? It is in these places that you will find the tests and choices that will forge your new identities. So go in! All you must do is leave the car. An Edge cannot harm you in any way unless you choose to take a risk. Whether you must take risks in order to reach the spirit at the Edge's heart is a matter of some debate.

-For any Edge the PCs enter on foot, the GM needs to narrate one or more **obstacles** to the players' progress. The **type** of challenge does not matter: creative, psychological, physical, intellectual are all fine. Look over your list of ADJs and **Tests**. Also draw inspiration from the PCs' backgrounds, relationships to each other, and anything that's been played.

The point is not to challenge the players, but to help them do their job.

The players' job is to **reveal the character of their PCs** under pressure.

Once this is achieved, the GM should introduce the Edge's spirit, or Stranger.

-When an Edge takes on a body and voice to speak to an ROP pack, we call it a Stranger. Strangers' purposes may or may not mesh with ours, but they are always honest.

-Here's what **GMs need to know** to portray their first Stranger:

Make the Stranger a cool **embodiment** of the Edge. The only requirement is that it must communicate in words. It can be a man, a woman, a cat, a tree, a mountain, a cloud, a glow, a hiss -- whatever works aesthetically.

Strangers want certain things from humans, but can't see them well until the humans have Skins harvested from an Edge. The first Stranger will offer to **manifest** whatever **beasts** the PCs choose into their Edge after the PCs have **decided as a group** what those beasts should be.

The Stranger should also promise that it **will make a valuable offer** once it can see the PCs more clearly.

-Now it is time for perhaps the biggest decision of your lives. It is time to choose the physical manifestation of your adult identity. **It is time to decide which animal's Skin you will wear and ultimately bond with.**

Where you come from, most **successful** adults are specialists with **special physiques**. A policeman's hide might be sleek like a greyhound, and his nose just as sensitive. A politician's yellow eyes and hair tufts might bespeak the wisdom of a horned owl. A learned instructor might have the memory, and the rock solid presence, of an elephant.

These men and women earned their Skins on their own rites of passage.

Those with the **human skins** of their birth are seen as **losers, failures, and children**, fit only for the most unskilled tasks. How many times did they try an ROP journey and fail? After failing a first effort, it can be hard to form or join a pack for a **second try** one year later. Third attempts and beyond are rare indeed, and require special convincing to even be allowed.

Each of you must think about the others in your pack. What is right for them? What skins should they wear? You know them well, and may be more **objective** about their true natures and prospects.

Your fates are **intertwined**, as only a fully-Skinned group will be allowed to keep their skins upon return home; one member with a Skin merely two thirds bonded will revert all returnees back to flesh. (Those who do not return at all have no such impact.)

It is time for you all to have your first Pack Moot.

The **Pack Moot** is a simple ritual that takes on special significance in the Edges. It requires a campfire circle and a rich, energizing herbal tea (materials provided, in the car's trunk). The pack discusses and votes on each other's paths. It is each pack member's **right to obey or disobey** the vote -- the others are forbidden to interfere, even if disobeying costs them a Necessity -- but the power of the ritual lends these choices **special consequences**.

PACK MOOT

STEP 1

Any PC **faced with a Choice** gets one sentence to say how their **desire relates** to an ADJ of their Skin.

Any PC who has a **Request** for something they want to do, that they feel **reflects their identity**, gets one sentence to state that.

STEP 2

In **turns**, each PC **leaves** the room, while the other PCs briefly **discuss** them.

Should the player leave the room when their PC isn't there? Or at least plug their ears? It's up to them. Some players like to hear about their characters beyond what the character knows. This is fine, so long as they don't attempt to influence the other players, who are discussing in-character.

Each discussion produces one **Question** for that PC that must be voted on.

- For the **first Pack Moot**, the question is, "**What Skin** should that PC wear?" If you don't like the Skin they're after, come up with a new one, complete with ADJs. The GM can help.

- For a **Choice**, it's obvious: should they pay the Price or not? The group must also decide whether the PC's **desire is appropriate** to any of their skin's ADJs or not. If not, they must pick another ADJ that describes it and is appropriate for that PC in general. They can pick from the PC's original 3 ADJs, or invent a new one.

- The **biggest possible Question** is "Should they **ditch** their current skin?"

- If the Skin is not a question and there's no Choice, just go with something any PC thinks is **suitable for their identity**, so they'll have an opportunity to strengthen their bond. Doing otherwise is a dick move. If they made a **Request** that the group deems apt, you can go with that. Voting here becomes a mere formality.

Each player **writes this question** down, but no one votes yet.

STEP 3

After each player's had their turn out of the room, every player votes (in character) on all the questions they have written down.

PACK MOOT

STEP 4

Questions & votes revealed.

STEP 5

Each player must decide whether their PC will obey the majority, or not.

Every PC gets a **point** in the **ADJ** the **group** feels applies.

- If you **obey** the group's decision, the point goes in **Socialized**.
- If you **disobey** the group's decision, the point goes in **Egocentric**.

If the ADJ is one from your Skin, the Skin **bonds further**. The GM describes this, adding subtly **supernatural** touches (e.g. Edge-like shifting) for **Egocentric** points.

LEVELS OF SKIN:

When **any Skin ADJ** reaches (# of PCs minus 1) total points, the skin bond manifests in one permanent way. The GM describes this, according to his list of **Physical Features** (above note on supernatural applies).

When **all of a skin's ADJs** reach this level, the skin bonds **permanently** and you achieve your final adult form.

- If **any ADJ has more Egocentric** points than Socialized points, there is a permanent, subtle trace of the Edges to your appearance. To fit in back home, you will have to hide this.
- If **two or more ADJs are primarily Egocentric**, you **cannot re-enter society**. You may remain in the Edges, ruling the Strangers as a Fixed One; or, you may wander off in search of other realities.

If **3 non-Skin ADJs** reach this level, you have achieved an **Identity as a human**. You can never bond (to any extent) to a Skin; if you are wearing one, it peels off of you.

PACK MOOT

SPECIAL: Second Skins.

Removing a Skin subtracts one point each from all that skin's ADJs.

Taking a subsequent Skin likewise subtracts one point each from the new Skin's ADJs (it's a "reset").

ADJs with both Socialized and Egocentric points subtract from Socialized. ADJs with no points are unaffected.

You can't skin the same type of animal twice.

SPECIAL: Interfering.

The rules of your people hold that obstruction (forcibly **stopping someone** from disobeying a vote) **voids an ROP**. If any member of the pack is not free to reveal who they truly are, then nothing has been learned or proven. **All returnees revert back to flesh.**

Still, perhaps a better fate than being marooned in the Edges without the Necessities you need to return home.

-Now you may hunt and skin the animals you have chosen.

-This follows the same procedure as the obstacles and Tests of finding a Stranger.

Once you don your Skin, **write it** on your character sheet above the ADJs that comprise it.

-Within a few hours, the skins will be stuck to your human skin. Your sense of touch will faintly extend into them. Peeling them away would be painful!

-Gain **1 point of Socialized** in each **ADJ** of your **Skin**.

-Chapter Three:

Now that the local Stranger will be able to see you, return to it and see what it has to offer. Strangers are willing to offer truly useful Gifts, but they always demand true sacrifices in return. A choice that's tough enough to deserve a pack moot is what they strive for. They are too perceptive to swindle, and may grow angry if you try.

-Here's what **GMs need to know** to portray **Strangers with Gifts**:

Strangers desire to be made Real, and think that the **investment** of humans will achieve this. The way they measure investment is **sacrifice**, and the way they measure sacrifice is that a decision is **tough** enough to **deserve a pack moot**. They know packs use moots for **important** matters, and the Strangers want to be sure they're important.

To elicit a sacrifice, each Stranger **offers** one of the **Gifts** the GM created earlier, and **haggles** over a **Price** until they create a moot-worthy **Choice**. They'll sweeten a deal (lowering a Price and/or adding on to a Gift), but as soon as the GM gets any sense the PCs are **trying to milk** a Stranger, the Stranger should give a **final offer** the GM feels is moot-worthy.

If the players are confused or curious, the GM should **explain this dynamic** to them, either directly ("Your elders told you...") or from the mouth of the Stranger.

Example Prices:

- a group Necessity (car, map, etc.)
- time (lose a visit to another Edge)
- a previously-obtained Gift
- any PC's Skin
- other PC's personality (1 point off 1 ADJ of current skin)
- other PC's body part or other established valuable
- other PC's name
- 10 years of other PC's life

"**other PC**" means "**not** gift recipient"

Extra note: Strangers revere and are happy to serve the **Fixed Ones**. They think of them as Strangers who are Real. They were once humans, and got stuck (or chose to remain) in the Edges.

-When you return to the car and leave an Edge, you will soon see from the sun's position that time has passed. To return home, you must arrive before the road sun has completed a 24-hour cycle. You left just after sun-up; should you arrive later than the next sun-up, you will be lost forever in the Edges.

Deep within an Edge, and on the road, time is unlimited; only crossing between them advances the clock. Your ROP journey can take years if that's how long it takes you to become who you want to be. You will return home only a day older than when you left.

-The GM **multiplies** the number of PCs by 3. This is the **number of additional Edges** (beyond the first one where they got skins) that the PCs can visit and still **make it home in time**.

Once the PCs have been to enough Edges (2? 3?) to gauge the passage of time, the GM should feel free to **tell them** how many edges they have time for.

-Continue through the Edges, journeying deep into the ones that call out to you. Partake of their Gifts, if you can bear their prices. Above all, help your pack mates become who they should be, just as they will do for you.

-Repeat the process for each Edge:

- **chat** in the car while entering
- drive deeper in, see **Edge's full extent**
- stop the car and get out when someone **reacts** strongly
- encounter **obstacles** to reaching Edge's center
- struggle through obstacles and **reveal characters**
- **bargain** with Stranger
- **pack moot**
- follow through on decisions, return to car, leave Edge

-Conclusion & Epilogue:

The time has come to re-enter society. Will you be barred from return as Ego-centric? Will you let the pack down, or be let down, as your Skins are incomplete? Or will you arrive, triumphant, joining your new social niche -- which may or may not be what you'd aspired to?

-By the time you visit your final Edge, at latest, you'll know the answers to these questions. Once you know, the game might be over. The group has the option of roleplaying the PCs' return, and every player has the option of an epilogue.

NAME:

CHARACTER SHEET

APPEARANCE:

PACK:

Relationship with _____:

Relationship with _____:

Relationship with _____:

Relationship with _____:

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE

LIFE FACTS

Home:

Job:

Entertainment:

Love about life:

Hate about life:

Family:

Starting _____	EGOCENTRIC	SOCIALIZED
ADJ		
ADJ		
ADJ		

_____	EGOCENTRIC	SOCIALIZED
ADJ		
ADJ		
ADJ		

VOTE	QUESTION

CONFLICTING DESIRE:

SKIN BONDING:

