

The Obvious Plays,  
Their Various Consequences  
& The Powers of the Circus  
a playbook for  
Under Hollow Hills

By Meguey & Vincent Baker



# The Obvious Plays, Their Various Consequences & The Powers of the Circus

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**a lumpley game**

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# To Play a Person...

## Confront Someone

When you confront someone, roll. On any hit, you interrupt them and they can't proceed without dealing with you. On a 10+ hit, they have to choose whether to back down and give you your way, or defy you and force your hand. On a 7–9 hit, if they don't want to back down or force your hand, they can try to prevaricate, mollify you, explain, bargain, or justify themselves instead. On a miss, ask the MC what goes wrong. Perhaps you've tipped your hand.

## Draw Someone Out

When you draw someone out, roll. On any hit, you seize their attention and they open up to you. On a 10+ hit, ask them 2 of the following; they must answer honestly. On a 7–9 hit, ask 1.

- What are you considering?
- Where are you open to me, where are you vulnerable, and where are you guarded?
- What are you forgetting, ignoring, or keeping from yourself?
- What do you hope I'll do?
- What are you afraid I'll do?
- What do you expect, and how do you feel about it?

On a miss, ask the MC what goes wrong. They might have you choose 1 anyway, but be prepared for the worst. Perhaps you've revealed yourself to them instead.

In circumstances where you can help someone, endanger them, entice them, or strike them by drawing them out, add this question:

- I do indeed draw you out, by doing [x]. What's the effect?

## Open Up to Someone

When you open up to someone, roll. On any hit, you capture their attention and they must hear you out.

On a 10+ hit, choose 2 of the following. On a 7–9 hit, choose 1.

- Ask them to do something for you. If they do it, you're beholden to them, in proportion, as they judge it, but if they refuse, you may consider it an insult.
- Reveal to them something you're considering, and judge their reaction to it. Ask their player what they think; they have to tell you. This can be implicit or explicit, and they may or may not realize what they've revealed.
- Offer them something, explicitly or implicitly. If they accept it, they're beholden to you, in proportion, as you judge it, but if they refuse, you may consider it an insult.
- Confide in them, explain something to them, or make them an invitation. Tell them what you reveal and ask them how they take it. They must answer honestly.

On a miss, ask the MC what goes wrong. They might have you choose 1 anyway, but be prepared for the worst. Perhaps they rebuff you before you even have the chance to open up to them.

## Put Someone Off

When you put someone off, roll. On any hit, they must back off and give you time and space. On a 10+ hit, they have to physically leave or let you leave yourself. On a 7–9 hit, they can remain nearby, if they choose, and follow along behind you if you leave. On a miss, ask the MC what goes wrong. Perhaps you've insulted them.

## Size Someone Up

When you size someone up, roll. On any hit, ask them questions; they must answer honestly. These are things that you realize about them from just a quick look; you need not speak or interact in any way. On a 10+ hit, ask them 2 questions. On a 7–9 hit, ask them 1.

- What do you intend to do?
- How far are you prepared to go?
- Where are you confident, and where are you uncertain?
- What do you hope will happen, what do you fear, and how prepared are you for each?

On a miss, ask the MC what goes wrong. They might have you choose 1 anyway, but be prepared for the worst. Perhaps you've revealed your attention or your intentions to them.

## Waylay Someone

When you waylay someone, roll. On any hit, they must drop everything and deal with your attack. On a 10+ hit, choose 2 of the following. . On a 7–9 hit, choose 1. If your victim is another player's character, they choose, not you.

- You drive them scrambling back.
- You strike them violently, wounding and dismaying them.
- You seize bodily hold of them.
- You throw them off-balance and they stumble or fall.
- You shock and startle them and they panic or freeze.
- You dismay them and they throw themselves down and beg for mercy.

On a miss, ask the MC what goes wrong. They might have you choose 1 anyway, but be prepared for the worst. Perhaps you've overplayed your position and given them the upper hand.



# To Play a Situation...

## Call for a Line

When you want a suggestion, a prompt, a setup, some backup, some crowd control, a safety wire, or to hand the action off to someone else, call for a line. You can:

- Ask for suggestions for your next play.
- Ask someone else to make a play, if they're willing.
- Ask for solidarity in holding a line.
- Ask for help in reaching an outcome.
- Ask for backup in taking a risk.

For these purposes, the commitments you've made to each other in the circus supersede the usual fairy laws about favors and insults. You're not beholden to anyone for calling for a line, and nobody's insulting anyone by making a suggestion. The other players and the MC should offer the best help and suggestions they can. Take them up on it!

## Sniff the Wind

When you sniff the wind, roll. On any hit, ask the MC questions, which they must answer truthfully. On a 10+ hit, ask 2. On a 7–9 hit, ask 1.

- What's coming this way?
- What's here that I haven't yet seen?
- Whose territory is this? Whose doing?
- If I trust my feet to carry me to safety, where will they take me?
- How could I make myself invisible here, how could I go unnoticed?
- If I trust my nose to lead me to the heart of this, where would it take me next?

On a miss, ask the MC what goes wrong. They might have you choose 1 anyway, but be prepared for the worst. Perhaps you've disturbed something or someone without realizing.

## Use Your Trappings

Use one of your trappings whenever, however, and as often as you like. When you do, tell the MC and the other players what you're doing, answer their questions, and ask what happens.

## Weather the Storm

When you weather the storm, whatever danger, disaster, or developing catastrophe it is, roll. On any hit, choose 1:

- The storm rages around me but doesn't move me from my place.
- I ride the storm where it carries me, but don't lose my feet.

On a 10+ hit, choose 2 or 3 of the following. On a 7–9 hit, choose 1 or 2:

- I'm calm enough.
- I'm fearless enough.
- I'm patient enough.
- I'm quick enough.
- I'm strong enough.
- I can endure the pain.
- I can provide care and healing to those around me.
- I can provide calm and direction to those around me.
- I can provide strength and protection to those around me.
- I am —, or I can —.

On a miss, choose 1 that you are or can, and 1 that you definitely aren't or can't.

Ask the MC what happens and where you are now.

# Consequences

## Summer & Winter (&c.)

When you step toward summer, erase one of the marks in the winter column and mark the same line in the summer column.

When you step toward winter, erase one of the marks in the summer column and mark the same line in the winter column.

Whenever you step toward summer or toward winter, take 1 from one of your plays' rolls and add 1 to a different play's roll. Choose intentionally, to match your feeling about the change. Keep to a minimum of -2 and a maximum of +3.

### For human beings:

Instead of stepping toward summer, you step toward bold, cheerful, free, open, or your equivalent. Instead of stepping toward winter, you step toward careful, downcast, wary, or your equivalent. In all other ways, follow the rules for summer & winter.

## Missing a Play

When you make a play and roll a miss, 6 or less, the play tells you what to do. In the obvious plays and in many of your playbook plays, you're to "ask the MC what goes wrong." For these plays, the MC always has the option to ignore the play's suggestion, and to choose this instead:

- Making the play well is hard. It demands energy and focus, or is otherwise stressful or tiring. You get the effects of a 7–9 hit, but step toward winter (or your equivalent).

## Beholden

When someone does you a favor, you are beholden to them.

When you are beholden to someone, fairy law and your fairy nature demand that you make good and deliver the balance. If you are recalcitrant or uneager to do so, your debtor may consider it an insult or a worse offense.

### For human characters:

When you are beholden, fairy law demands that you make good and deliver the balance. Human honor might compel you too, but it's a lax taskmaster compared to fairy nature. Regardless, if you are recalcitrant or uneager, your debtor may consider it an insult or worse.

## Insults

When someone insults you, you're allowed by fairy law and your fairy nature to answer it. It's considered to be your own unimpeachable right to weigh the insult and respond in due measure, so only you can choose what form your answer should take and how extreme it should be. Other fairies may gossip, but no fairy would rightly stand before you and assert that you've overstepped.

### For human characters:

When someone insults you, you're allowed by fairy law to answer it. It's considered to be your own unimpeachable right to weigh the insult and respond in due measure, so only you can choose what form your answer should take and how extreme it should be. Lenience is a human trait, not a fairy trait, so if you're moderate in your response, you can set fairy tongues wagging.

# Fighting

When you fight with someone, you do it by confronting them, in which case you can strike and injure them if they force your hand; by drawing them out, in which case you can strike and injure them by choosing to draw them out to that effect; or by waylaying them, in which case you strike and injure them if you choose the option to do so.

For a fight on equal footing between ready opponents, they each roll to draw the other out. For NPCs, the MC rolls.

Should an NPC waylay you, the MC doesn't roll for them. Instead, you should choose how to play it. One obvious answer is to weather the storm. You might choose to play it differently — if you're the Boondoggle Hob, for instance, you might shrug it off instead; if you're the Winding Rose, you might decide to twine danger around — but weathering the storm is an easy and good choice.

# Violence

Violence in fairyland is considered visceral, irrevocable, and horrifying. When you're wounded, shocked, affronted, or dismayed, you must immediately choose 1:

- You die.
- You withdraw at once in a cold, dignified fury.
- You writhe, moan, and curse in a display of melodramatic agony.
- You step immediately and fully to winter.
- You consider yourself cruelly mistreated and maimed, and will long nurse your injuries and your grudge.

True death: there are only a few things that can truly kill a fairy. Cold iron is one; there are others. There's no coming back from true death.

## For human characters:

For human beings in fairyland, like you, violence is no game.

You can shrug off a verbal assault that would murder any fairy dead, but a sword thrust through you, however playfully, will end your life forever.

Most fairies won't kill you on purpose — it wouldn't occur to them — but they might kill you at any moment by pure whimsical mischance.



Consequently, you must play violence in 2 different ways.

When you're verbally assaulted, shocked, affronted, or dismayed, choose 1:

- You withdraw in as much fury, and with as much dignity, as your human nature allows.
- You lash out in return, with that distinctive impulsive human passion.
- You consider yourself offended, and will nurse your fleeting human grudge as long as you're able.

When you're physically assaulted or wounded, roll a single die:

- On a 4, 5, or 6, you're wounded and must nurse your injury until it heals.
- On a 2 or 3, you're wounded dangerously, and you need to get skilled help quickly or the wound will kill you. (Any problem solver in the circus will know what to do.)
- On a 1, you're fatally wounded. Die now or die in a few painful minutes.

As a matter of curiosity, not of consequence, when you die, one of two things will happen, entirely outside of your control. The first possibility is that you will plainly and simply die. The second is that you will die, but not plainly: something of your nature will remain in fairyland forever, not alive but animate, some fairy's truly kept thing.

# Powers of the Circus

## Acknowledge or Celebrate a Change in the Circus' Roster

When you acknowledge or celebrate a change in the circus' roster, welcoming someone new, bidding them goodbye, or inviting them to return, any majority means that you've truly done so: you've bid them truly welcome, bid them truly goodbye, or truly invited them back. A unanimity means that the audience joins in as well, with unstinting acclaim. A split or a minority means that you've still done it, but the MC has to consider and judge: the ones who chose it are beholden to the ones who didn't; or else the ones who didn't choose it have insulted the ones who did. If there haven't been any changes to the circus' roster, don't choose this.

## Captivate Someone by Name

When you captivate someone by name, it must be someone present for the performance. A unanimity means that you draw them into the performance at its finale, overcome, unthinking, in wonder. A majority means that they try to meet the performers after the performance, to offer them praise, opportunity, and/or largesse. A split or a minority means that they care to meet only you and the other performers who voted their support.

## Captivate the Audience as a Whole

When you captivate the audience as a whole, inspiring them to largesse, a unanimity means that they share freely what they have in plenty, and also impoverish themselves of what they hold dear. A majority means that they only share freely what they have in plenty. A split or a minority means that they applaud politely and tip well enough.

## Give this Place its Voice

When you give this place its voice, any majority means that the place can speak freely in its own voice. Ask the MC what it says. A unanimity means that, furthermore, it can act, for the moment, on its own behalf. Ask the MC what it does. A split or minority means that it can't speak in its own voice, but you can speak for it. Ask the MC what it whispers to you, and decide for yourself whether to speak for it.

## Change Someone's Fortune

When you change someone's fortune, first name them, then name the way you want their fortune to change. You can change anything about them except their nature and their past: their form, their seeming, their luck, their health, their circumstances, the privileges they enjoy or the limitations imposed upon them. A unanimity means that the change you describe comes true in the absolute, and that your subject, this place, and the people here, if appropriate, are already beginning to forget that it used to be otherwise. A majority means that the change you describe comes true as you described it, but that the change is not absolute, and the habits and memories of your subject, this place, and the people here might, over time or without care, reassert the old fortunes. A split or minority means that the change you describe comes true in broad, but those who voted in opposition can, if they like, put their heads together and choose one way in which it does not come true.

If you choose to name another player's character, they can accept, or else they can demur and have you make a different choice instead.

## Hold, Advance, or Turn Back the Season of this Place

When you hold, advance, or turn back the season of this place, first name the course you want the seasons to take. Any majority means that the season advances, turns back, or holds, according to your chosen course, and furthermore, that no one else can use their turn to change it again. A unanimity means that it's already begun happening by the end of the performance. A majority means that it'll begin happening by the end of the session. A split or a minority means that the season's advance remains outside of the circus' direction: it advances, or does not, just as it would have if the circus hadn't come.

When the season of a place changes, it's up to the MC to reflect the change in the people and circumstances here.

## Make the Audience Dance to Your Tune

When you make the audience dance to your tune, don't call for a vote. Instead, describe what you want the audience to do and draw them out. Choose I do indeed draw you out, by doing [x]. What's the effect?

## Direct the Circus' Course Toward the Other World

When you turn the circus' course toward the other world, a unanimity means that when you leave this place after your show, you'll arrive in the other world. A majority means that you'll arrive between worlds, or into your chosen world if you were between worlds already. A split or a minority means that you remain in the world you're in.

If you're already between worlds, be sure to choose which world you're stepping toward.

## Turn the Circus Itself Toward Summer or Toward Winter

When you turn the circus itself toward summer or toward winter, first choose "toward summer" or "toward winter." A unanimity means that everyone in the circus steps twice toward the chosen season. A majority means that everyone in the circus steps once toward it. A split or a minority means that you and those who voted their support step toward it, and those who didn't, don't.

## Perform Your Own Act of Power

When you perform your own act of power, describe it and its effects carefully. Make sure the MC understands it and that all the players consider it reasonable, then call for a show of support. A unanimity means that it has just the effect that you intended. A majority means that it has much the effect that you intended, but you and those who voted in support should put your heads together with the MC and decide where and how far it falls short. A split or a minority means that, in the moment, you can feel that you do not have the power of the circus at your command. You may use a different circus power instead, if you choose, or else ask the MC and the other players what goes wrong.

# Under Hollow Hills

There is a traveling circus under the Hollow Hills.

It travels by moonlight, small wagons creaking in the night silence. It travels lost roads, where fireflies and whisps hover to watch it pass, where goblins peer down from their treebranch perches, and owls. It travels the night world and the day world, fairyland and the living earth, and places otherwise, and no border can keep it. It has mysteries to pose, drama to perform, it has music, juggling, acts of death-defying peril, pratfall comedy. It has dangerous secrets to tell.

Step up, step up. Come great, come small, come revelers all!

