



LUSKIA

DREAM WORLD ROLEPLAYING

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Jenga is the property of Parker Brothers / Hasbro. The idea of using a Jenga tower in roleplaying comes from the Dread system by The Impossible Dream, <http://www.tiltingatwindmills.net/>

LuShu

A Wushu Open adaptation of Lucid

Written by Steve Keller

Based on
WuShu Open by Daniel Bayne
and
L.U.C.I.D. by Chad Wattler

LuShu is a collaborative roleplaying game, made up on the fly. LuShu game play uses collaborative storytelling - the players and the Game Master all contribute to telling the story. The players control the *characters*, the stars of the story, and the Game Master plays all of the non-player characters, the *extras*.

LuShu is meant to be played in a single session. Each adventure is run in timed sections, and one game session takes about 4 hours to play.

LuShu's combat and traits are based on the *WuShu Open* roleplaying system, with the *Dread* tower mechanic. The setting comes from the game *L.U.C.I.D.*, based on the movie *Inception*.

THE WORLD OF LUSHU

LuShu is set in a vague present or near future, anywhere on Earth.

The characters are skilled con-artists employed (legally or otherwise) to infiltrate the dreams of a target, the *mark*, and retrieve or leave behind some key bit of information.

They'll study the mark and learn their habits and personalities. They'll need four or five hours alone with the mark in order to sedate them and infiltrate their subconscious. This isolation is known as the *grab*.

Once the mark is isolated, sedated,

and wired up to the dream machines, the team will bring the mark into a dream world they've designed to pick apart the mark's memories or plant new ones.

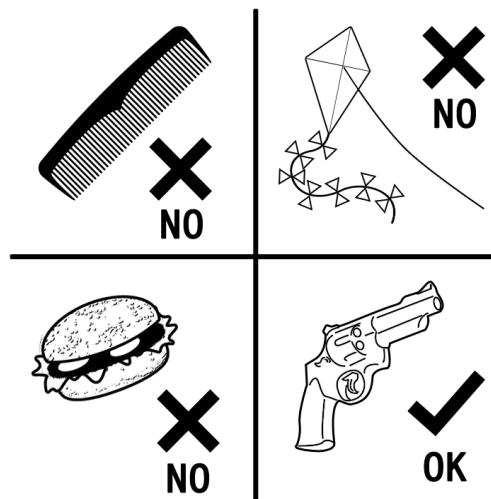
If it works, the team makes the *score* and they get paid.

If not, they could lose their very lives.

PLAYING LUSHU

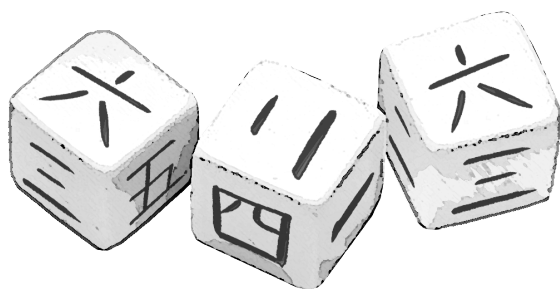
LuShu requires at least three players and a Game Master. An ideal game will have 4 or 6 players.

You will need at least 5 six-sided dice for each player and one Jenga tower to play LuShu. It's preferable for each player to have their own dice, but not necessary.



LuShu characters need only a *name*, four *traits*, and one *weakness* to be playable. Additionally, players will need to track their character's and 3 *will* points during the game.

A *trait* is a word or short phrase that describes one aspect of the character.



Professional traits describe what the character can do, things like “Computer Hacker”, “Police Detective”, “Race Car Driver”.

Personal traits describe who the character is. “Millionaire Playboy”, “Really, Really, Ridiculously Good Looking”, and “Excellent Poker Player” are possibilities.

Each trait gives the character an implied set of skills which they can make use of during the game. A character with “Construction Worker” as a trait can not only use tools, but may also be able to make guesses about how a building is constructed, use heavy machinery, and maybe even have increased strength from lifting cement bags all day.

Traits may also include a combat ability such as “Boxer” or “Kung

Fu” (indeed, a fighting skill is recommended).

A weakness is a shortcoming in the character. Weaknesses include things such as “Alcoholic”, “Fear of Cats”, or “Can’t Make Left Turns”. A Weakness should add to the story drama not make the character unusable in the game.

If you do not choose a weakness for your character, the GM will choose one based on the questionnaires given to the players.

Each trait starts at a default level of 2, and players have 5 more points to distribute among their traits any way they see fit.

No trait can have a level higher than 5 at the start of the game. Weaknesses have no level.

LuShu character templates may include one or two professional traits automatically. These traits are not optional and do count toward the four trait total for each character. Abilities are not traits and do not count toward the total.

All characters have 3 *will* points.

TEAM ROLES

Before defining the character's traits, however, players must decide which team role their characters will play.

THE POINT

The point is the team leader.



It will be the point's job to interface with the client and put together the team. The point decides which team members

have access to what information, and is responsible for keeping the team organized and on task at each stage of the job.

Professional Traits

Skilled Leader +1

Abilities

Team Leader - When a team member needs to make a general roll and the point is with them or can contact them directly, the point can provide encouragement and directino before the roll is made. The point makes a general roll on the *skilled leader* trait - if successful, the coached player may treat all dice rolled on their next general roll as if they were 1 point higher.

Burden of Command - Any time another player is asked to make more than one pull of discord, the point can try to coach that character through their predicament. The point player may then take one or more pulls on behalf of the other player.

Or, the point player may try to lessen the impact of the discord. to do this, they make a general roll on their *skilled leader* trait and, if successful, the number of pulls is reduced by one.

THE ARCHITECT

The architect builds the dream world.

A good architect is a polymath whose knowledge goes beyond architecture to psychology or dream symbolism. The architect designs dreams which manipulate the mark psyche.



Professional Traits

Well Educated - The architect gains a +1 to any scholarly traits

Abilities

Dream Manipulation - The architect can

call on this ability to summon up any objects, as long as the items fit into the theme of the dream.

The architect can also “teleport” themselves short distances. When using their ability this way, the architect makes 1 pull of discord.

If used during combat, the architect automatically gains 4 successful defenses for the current round of combat before they teleport.

THE CHEMIST

The chemist prepares a carefully measured concoction of chemicals to bring the mark and the rest of the team into a deep sleep and keep them there for the duration of the job. The chemist is the only one who can drop the team into a deeper dream level.



Professional Traits

Chemistry +1

Abilities

Steady the Dream - When a character on the same dream level as the chemist must make a discord pull, the chemist

may place one fingertip against any part of the tower while the pull is being made.

Balance Sedation - Once per dream level, if the chemist is on that level, they can attempt to calm any discord with skilled pharmacy. The chemist makes a general roll on their *chemistry* trait and, if successful, the required pulls for one discord event are negated.

THE COUNTERFEITER



It is the counterfeiter who will have the most contact with the mark, both in the dream world and out of it. A fast tongue and quick thinking are the counterfeiter's primary tools.

Professional Traits

Fast Talker +1

Abilities

Alter Appearance - Whenever out of the mark's view, the counterfeiter can change their appearance. The mark will accept them as the person they appear to be - as will any agents in the dream - As long as they don't act too out of character.

Risk Taker - The counterfeiter can try to lessen the damage of any discord by fast-talking the mark. A general roll against the *fast talker* trait is made and, if successful, the counterfeiter can pick up a piece that has already been removed from the tower and replace it anywhere. This ability can be used even if all pulls have been negated by another role's ability.

THE HEAVY

This role is responsible for the safety of the other team members, in the dream and out.

The heavy is usually heavily armed with traits that reflect a skill and willingness in using force to solve problems.



Professional Traits

Trained Fighter - The heavy gains +1 to all combat related traits

Abilities

Free Runner - The heavy can instantly move to any part of the dream within their sightv without drawing discord.

This ability can only be used during combat if the heavy scores 2 or more defense successes.

Toughened Mind - When not free running, the heavy gains one automatic defense success during combat.

THE TOURIST

Tourists are observers. The client may assign one to the group to make sure the job is done. Occassionally, the client will want to observe in person. An organization may want a tourist to record events in the dream for legal reasons. Or, a tourist could be a potential team member being trained. Whatever their reason for being there, the tourist is almost always a liability because of their inexperience.

Professional Traits

None

Abilities

Sour Luck - Once per level, the tourist player can take another player's discord by narrating how it was the tourist, not another character, that caused discord by getting in the way, not following directions, or just generally being stupid. The tourist can then make only a single pull to resolve the other player's discord.



NARRATING THE STORY

The heart of role-playing in LuShu is *narrative*. Players narrate on behalf of the stars of the story, the *characters*, while The Game Master narrates the story on behalf of the game world and its inhabitants, known as *extras*.

Turns proceed clockwise from the Game Master, who opens each scene by describing the setting and the extras who are present, with each player narrating what their character does.

NARRATIVE TRUTH

As the players build their narrative it becomes part of the story; this is called *Narrative Truth*.

Narrative details include character actions, interactions with the surroundings, even witty quips and one-liners. The more details added to their narrative, the richer the story.

Players are rewarded for adding details to their narrative. A short description -

I punch the closest thug and kick backwards at the one behind me.

doesn't gain as much as -

I chop the closest thug in the throat and pull him close, trapping his arm under mine. I squeeze the trigger, shooting at the other thugs while shouting, "Surrender? I'll surrender these bullets to your face!"

Once each player has a chance to narrate their character's part in the scene, the Game Master narrates for the extras.

LIMITS OF NARRATIVE

To prevent abuse, there are a few limits imposed on Lushu narrative.

1. Narrated events must take place in the present tense

As players describe the characters' actions, they should keep the action in the present tense and describe only what the character is doing now, not what they do after.

Good - I jump over the table and flying side-kick Power Horse toward the exploding generator while yelling, 'Your CAPACITY for evil has met its RESISTANCE! Hope this SHOCKING revelation HERTZ!'

Bad - I side-kick Power Horse into the generator and he's immobilized by the arcing electricity. Then I put on insulated gloves and start rabbit punching him. Then I raise him over my head in triumph and yell "you've met your resistance!"

2. New narrative must begin immediately after the events of the previous narrative

Players may not use narrative that precedes or overrule's or alters the previous player's narrative.

Bad - ... but before he does that -

3. Narrate action, not outcome

Players may state what their character is doing, but not the outcome.

Bad - I slide across the hood of the car and kick the bazooka as he fires it. The shot arcs and hits Power Horse' fleeing helicopter instead of the Popemobile.

Good - I slide across the hood of the car, throwing shuriken at the bazooka in an attempt to knock it sideways so that the rocket hits Power Horse' helicopter instead of the Popemobile.

4. Narrative may not limit other characters' actions, even extras.

Actions can not disable, badly injure, or otherwise removes another character's ability to act. "Finishing moves" must be saved until an opponent is out of will.

Good - I grab the yellow ninja in a headlock and slam his head into the door. He stumbles backwards as I turn to face the red ninja.

Bad - I get the yellow ninja in a headlock and slam the closet door into his head until he's knocked out.

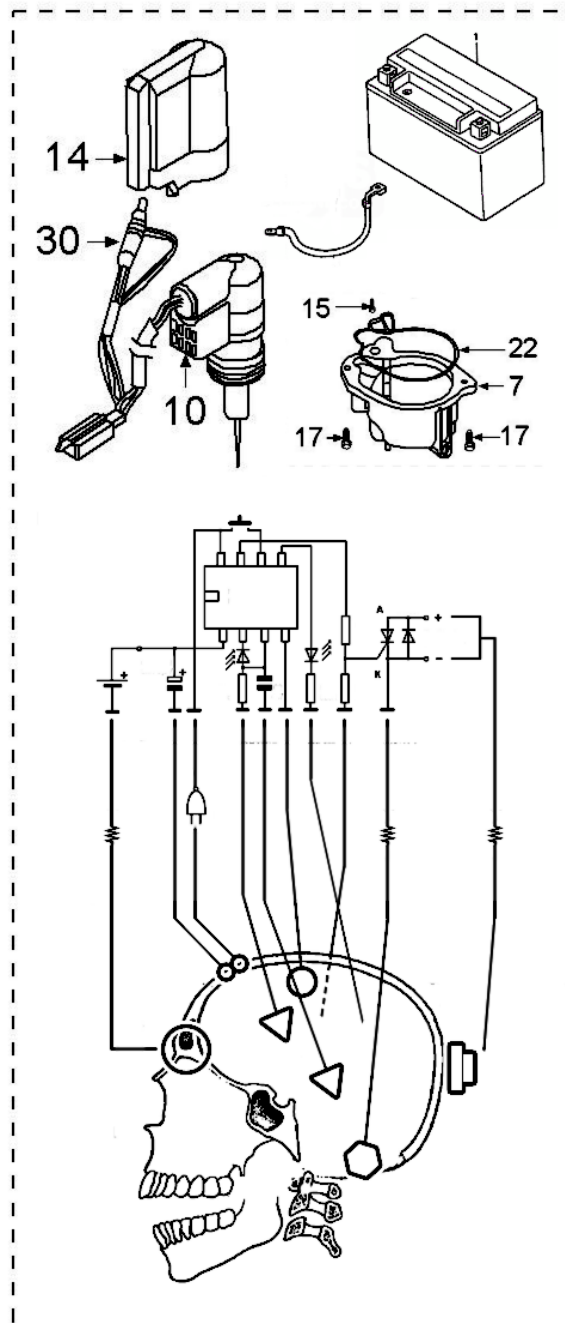
In the first example, the yellow ninja can still perform other actions on their turn, but has been "dealt with" momentarily.

Mooks are an exception as they can be disposed of in permanent ways

without interrupting the scene (there are always more mooks).

NARRATIVE VETOES

Despite the previous limits, narration can still "break" the story. There are three ways that Narrative Truth can be overridden to prevent this.



1. The Game Master may decide that a narrative moves the story clock too far forward.

The Game Master can interrupt narrative to pass the turn to the next player, narrate a reaction from the extras, or ask the player to back up a bit in their current narrative.

2. The Game Master may decide that a narrative makes it impossible for other characters to react or removes them from the story before their part is finished.

If this happens, the Game Master can overrule part or all of the narrative

and ask the player to replace offending details with new ones.

3. A majority of players may decide that the narrative has too great of an impact on the story, is too unrealistic, or is out of sync with the story's tone, genre or setting.

In this case, the other players may vote to veto the narrative and ask the player to reword it.

It's important to note that the Game Master has no power to veto narrative for story reasons. Since the story belongs to all of the players, that veto can only be used with consensus.

GENERAL ROLLS

Since narrative only describes actions, not outcome, a determination must be made when a character attempts an action whose outcome will affect the direction or progress of the story.

The acting player decides which trait covers that ability and picks up one die for each level. This is called the *dice pool*.

If none of the character's traits apply, the default pool is 2.

The player rolls all of the dice in the pool at the same time and sets aside the highest die. The result is compared to the **General Roll Outcome** table.

GENERAL ROLL OUTCOME TABLE

- 1. Horrible outcome** - Not only did the character fail, the attempt has caused other complications to arise.
- 2. Really bad outcome** - Things go wrong in a bad way for the character.
- 3. Failure** - The character failed, but didn't really screw up.
- 4. Success with complications** - The character made it, but the action had unforeseen negative complications.
- 5. Good success** - Things went Exactly as Planned, no better or worse.
- 6. Excellent success** - The character achieved their goal with unforeseen benefits as well.

COMBAT

Combat is done using dice pools. The number of dice combatants get to roll is determined by the narrative, not the trait level. Combatants take turns describing the fight. For each detail they add to the combat narrative, their dice pool increases by one die.

The game master sets a maximum size for the combat dice pool, usually 4 or 5 dice for fast-moving, deadly combat, up to 10 for brutal, bloody combat where combatants knock each other senseless for minutes on end.

Narrative goes back and forth between combatants, building pools. Once the maximum pool size is reached for both combatants, the dice are rolled. If both combatants have will remaining, another round of combat begins.

YIN AND YANG

Before they roll their pools, each player must decide how many of their dice will be used for *defending* and how many will go toward *attacking*.

Attack dice and defense dice should either be different colors or should be rolled separately.

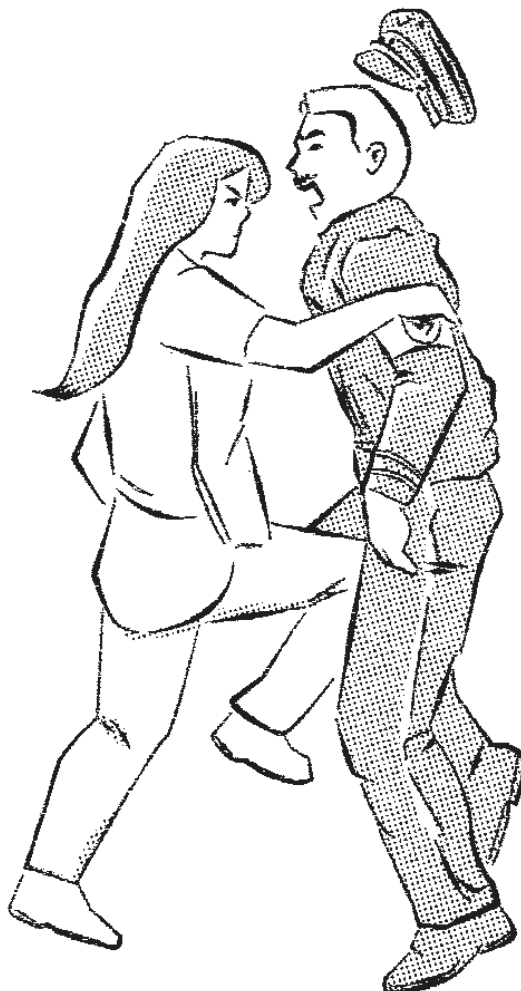
Rolled dice are compared to the character's combat skill (or 2 if the character has no combat skill). Any

die with a value less than or equal to that skill number is a success. Each defense success blocks one of the opponent's attack successes.

WILL

Will is LuShu's representation of the character's ability to keep trudging while taking a beating.

Each unblocked attack reduces the character's will by 1 point. If will



is less than zero, that character is *defeated* and taken out of the fight.

If two characters reach negative will at the same time, the character who goes the farther into negatives is the one who is defeated. Ties always go to the character.

The winning character gets to narrate the ending of the fight.

DEFEAT

Being defeated does not mean the character is dead, only that they no longer have the will or energy to continue fighting.

When a combat ends, the winner of the combat gets to narrate an appropriate ending to fight.

Defeated characters and nemeses can be killed during narration, but only if it is appropriate to the story.

At the end of the current scene, if a defeated character has not been killed or otherwise taken out of the story, they are restored to zero will points and can get to their feet.

In the real world, will is recovered when the character has had an appropriate amount of rest.

In the dream world, will is recovered between scenes.

COMBAT VS. MOOKS

Mooks are the cannon-fodder of LuShu, the hordes of minions who attack the characters en masse and fall in just as large numbers.

Mooks do not roll dice to attack or defend. Instead, mooks are given an *attack value* and a *threat rating*.

The attack is the number of successful hits the mooks do to *all* characters involved in the combat - usually 1, but can be a 2 if the mooks are particularly dangerous.

Characters can block mook attacks with defense rolls.

Each successful attack against the mooks reduces their threat by one point. Until the threat is reduced to 0, mooks will always either get back on their feet or new mooks will arrive to join the fray. When the threat reaches 0, all of the mooks have been defeated or have run away.

Dream world shades fight as mooks.

COMBAT VS. NEMESIS

Enemies that match the characters' strength are known as *nemeses*.

Nemeses have a combat trait (between 3 and 5 levels), and 3 will points.

Dream world *agents* fight as nemeses.

--- **ASSISTED COMBAT**

As any good action hero would, characters usually fight enemies alone. However, characters can team up against opponents.

When fighting mooks, each player involved narrates their action, up to the maximum dice pool. When all players have narrated their actions, all of the pools are rolled at the same time. Successful attacks are applied to the mooks' threat. Successful defense rolls can be spread among

the characters as the players see fit - a character in danger of being defeated, for example, can be defended by the other characters.

If the mooks still have a threat rating, another turn is started.

When multiple characters fight against the same nemesis, one player has a round of combat against the opponent. If the nemesis still has will points, the first character steps aside (or is pushed aside) and the next character steps in for a round.

DISCORD

When dream events cause the mark to become worried or anxious, the dream world begins to become unstable. This is known as *discord*.

Characters can also cause discord by acting against the dream's setting, acting violently in an otherwise peaceful dream, or acting out of character while playing a role.

Dream stability is represented by a Jenga tower. When discord occurs, the game master will assign a rating of 1 to 5 depending on the severity. For each point, the character who caused

it must make one pull from the tower.

Pulled pieces are set aside, not placed back on top of the tower.

As discord accumulates, the tower gets weaker and thinner. If the tower collapses, the dream has been spun into turmoil and the characters must work to put it back together.

If no character is directly responsible for the discord, the point gets to decide which team member will make the pull or pulls.

LuShu is played in 4 stages - *Game Building, Planning, The Real World, The Dream*. At the start of each stage, a timer starts. When the timer runs out that stage of the game is over, regardless of what's occurring.

The first few times you play LuShu, feel free to ignore the clock during sections 1 and 2. This will give everyone more time to spend reviewing rules, role descriptions, and questionnaires.

1. GAME BUILDING - 1.5 HOURS

Each of the game building sections helps decide the nature of the game.

any complications that might arise from team members' histories, either personal or with each other.

CHARACTER ROLES

15 MINS

Players will have 15 minutes to decide which roles they will play on the team.

Players can be as terse or verbose as they like, but longer, exacting answers make it more difficult to merge all answers into a single story.

At a minimum, the team must have a *Point Man*, a *Chemist*, and an *Architect*. An ideal team will fill at least four of the roles.

COMPILING THE STORY

30 MINS

The Game Master now steps away from the table and compiles all of the answers into a story structure.

Do not decide character traits at this time. Do not create NPC characters to fill out the team.

They'll be looking for common themes in the answers given by the players and linking them into character relationships and short character biographies.

QUESTIONNAIRES

15 MINS

Once the players have decided which role they'll be playing on the team, the Game Master hands out questionnaires. These questions will help the Game Master define not only the mark and mission, but

They'll also be looking for information about who the mark is, how the mark is related to the team, and a reason why the team would be targetting this particular mark.

SETUP

15 MINS

The Game Master now presents what they've learned to the players about the character histories and the job. The players now work with the GM to fill in blanks in any of the following areas of story information -

The World - Where does the adventure take place? When?

Character Histories - Who are the team members? Why are they part of the team? Why are they taking this particular job?

Team History - How often has the team worked together? Do they work together well? What resources do they have at their disposal ordinarily? What resources can they call upon in a pinch?

The Mark - Who is the mark? What kind of person are they? Where do they live? What do they do for a living? Why are they the team's target?

The Client - Who is the client? How are they related to the mark? How did they learn about the team?

The Score - What is the team after? Are they to recover specific information or are they planting ideas? How careful do they have to be with the mark?

The Risk - What does the team stand to gain through success? How much do they stand to lose through failure?

CHARACTER CREATION

15 MINS

The players have a team story and world elements, now they can assign names and traits to their characters.

The professional traits assigned by the character's role do count toward the character's maximum number of traits, however any bonuses given to those traits are in addition to the 5 points players have to spend.

2. PLOT & SCHEME - 30 MINS

Now that the team has been assembled, the world has been defined, and the job has been laid out, it's time for the players to start making plans.

The next hour should be spent with the characters moving about the real world, studying the mark, preparing equipment, and deciding how to approach the job.

Any missing information about the mark and/or the world can be filled in as it becomes necessary.

The players and the Game Master to begin acting out vignettes where the characters undertake any action the player feels is necessary to accomplish the grab or design dream levels - equipment gathering, spying

on the mark, contacting professional partners who may be able to make things easier on the job, or hitting up relatives of the mark for information.

PLANNING THE GRAB

Players will want to ask about the mark's habits, personality, their personal history, and any other psychological tidbits that might help them in the dream.

They will also need to learn the mark's routines to plan out how they'll get the mark safe and sedated for up to six hours. Depending on the client's requests, they may even have to deposit the mark back where they were found.

DREAM DESIGN

While the rest of the team plans for the grab, the point man and the architect begin to design the dream they'll use to manipulate the mark.

There are three main ways they can build on information discovered about the mark to accomplish the score.

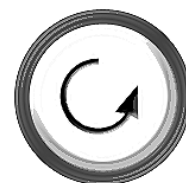
First, they can use dream allegory to learn information. If, for example, they need to get a phone number for a woman named Marie from a mark who is involved in computers, they may create a situation where a crisis can only be solved by finding the IP address of a server named MAR-E. The

mark's subconscious mind may then provide the phone number in place of the IP address.

Another method is to gain the mark's trust by creating a situation traumatic to the mark's. Recreating painful experiences in the mark's past or putting the mark into situations that play upon phobias are good ways to accomplish this. Once the mark is near a breaking point, the team will step in to rescue the mark, gaining their trust.

A third method involves creating a situation where the mark's defenses are completely down. To accomplish this, the team designs a dream of pure wish fulfillment for the mark. The mark becomes a baseball hero or a super spy. Whatever the situation, the mark is completely caught up in the fantasy and becomes highly suggestible and talks freely.

These three methods are, of course,



just common techniques. Teams may develop their own dream styles and formats depending on their skills, histories, and the job in question.

SECOND DREAM LEVEL

The team should also lay out ideas for a second dream level - a dream within a dream. If the first dream fails to accomplish the score, they can gain some extra time by entering a lower dream level.

This second level isn't as controllable

as the first. While architect can define the dream's environment, the mark's subconscious may include people and situations that the team didn't intend to be present.

THIRD DREAM LEVEL

Because the third level of the dream is so chaotic, neither the architect nor the counterfeiter are able to use their abilities there. The characters can prepare themselves for the possibility of the third level, but there's no reason to plan out a dream they cannot control.

3. THE REAL WORLD - 30 MINS

Now that the team has gathered its information and designed the dream(s), it's time for them to put their plans into action.

The real world plays with straight LuShu rules. There are no discord pulls or levels to worry about. However, if a character manages to get themselves killed in the real world, it's permanent.

Most of the story in the real world will be narrated by the players. The characters should put their plan for the grab in motion and, hopefully, isolate the mark and start the dream.

If time runs out before the mark is isolated, the team has failed to make the score. The GM should narrate how the mark escapes.

4. THE DREAM - VARIES

The grab is completed and the team make it to their hiding spot. Once the mark has been isolated and sedated,

safely hidden for a few hours, the characters themselves are sedated and the dream begins.

FIRST LEVEL - 45 MINS

The first level represents the mark's conscious mind and is the closest to the real world.

The clock is set to 45 minutes and the tower is built fresh. The architect narrates the setting of the dream, defining the location surroundings - buildings, terrain, smells and sounds, and any other relevant details.

The architect also narrates the type of *shades* found here. Shades are people who inhabit the backgrounds of the dream. They are the crowds on the street, the knots of party goers, the audiences. Shades will only appear as vague impressions, never important enough for the mark to interact with.

People in the dream world who have enough detail to interact with the mark are known as *roles*.

The team will take on roles while they're in the dream, however only the counterfeiter can take on a role representing someone the mark knows in the real world without risking discord.

Other roles are filled in by the mark's mind as the story requires them - if the mark is on a cruise ship, for example, a captain may spontaneously appear if not played by a team member.

Characters created by the mark's mind

is called a *projection*.

TRAVEL IN THE DREAM

The dream mind only fixates on events which have significance, so the team and mark may board a train and arrive almost immediately to their destination. Unless an event occurs during the trip, they'll be aware that they've traveled, but will not be able to recall the actual details of the trip.

IN-DREAM COMBAT

Depending on the dream's subject matter, the team and mark may (and likely will) find themselves involved in combat. Combat in all layers of the dream works by the same rules as combat in the real world. Because this a dream, however, the characters will be able to fight in a more action-movie, heroic fashion and do not get exhausted. Characters can also perform actions that they've otherwise had no experience with, if they are appropriate to the dream setting - characters might fight with laser swords in sci-fi dreams, or run along the tops of bamboo trees in a wuxia themed dream.

Combat-oriented traits adapt to the setting, regardless of the character's actual training.

The architect can assign shades to function as dream-appropriate enemies, fighting as mooks.

The mark's mind will also begin to protect itself against discord by directing projections to attack the thing causing the discord. For low levels of discord, the projects may just be shades.

For higher levels, the projects will be fewer in number, but tougher. These more aggressive projections are called *agents*. The number and strength of agents depends on how familiar the mark is with mental defense. A mark without even a basic knowledge of dream infiltration might only be able to generate a few guys in greasy tank-tops carrying wrenches, but a mark who has been trained to defend against dream infiltration may be able to generate a team of six to ten guys with sunglasses, suits and guns.

Shades fight as mooks. Threat is relative to the amount of discord. Agents fight as nemeses. All agents have a will of 2, with a generic fight trait between 2 and 4, depending on the marks' training.

The mark will not automatically

associate shades and agents with their own mind.

Fighting shades does not cause discord, and the attack ends when the shades are defeated. Fighting agents only causes discord when the mark feels that the team are the villains in the fight. A smart team will make the mark feel like they are a part of their group so that any attacks seem to be against the mark as well.

MOVING DOWN LEVELS

Characters, and the mark, can move down one level in the dream by surrendering consciousness in the current level. This is accomplished in two ways -

Sleep - If the characters, including the mark, can be convinced they're going to sleep, with or without pharmaceutical help, they'll descend to the next level of the dream.

Death - Getting killed in the current level will cause the mind to automatically drop into the next level.



THE SECOND LEVEL - 30

If the team do not make the score on the first level, then can drop down into the second level.

The second level represents the mark's internal monologue. The mark's feelings are worn more on their sleeves, and interactions with projections tend to be more emotional and intense.

Things work much like the first level, but seem slightly "muddled". Architecture is less defined, shades more vague.

When entering the second level, the

architect narrates the location of the dream and describes the general architecture and terrain, but objects and shades will be created by the mark's subconscious mind.

The clock is set to 30 minutes and the tower is rebuilt. An automatic 5 pulls of discord are made.

Agents will be more reactive to discord on this level.

All character dice pools are reduced by one die.

THE THIRD LEVEL - 20 MINUTES

The third level is a last resort for the team. It represents the mark's unstructured subconscious.

When entering the third level, the tower is built and a discord of 10 pulls is made. The clock is set to 20 minutes. The architect has no control on any aspect this dream level.

All character dice pools are reduced by one die before being rolled.

Additionally, all traits are treated as if they were one level less than they actually are.

Events in the third level tend to be highly chaotic and dangerous, as represented by the worst parts of the mark's inner turmoil.

Agents do not appear in the third dream level, but shades are much more numerous and are harder to fight.

MOVING BACK UP LEVELS

When moving up a level, the clock is reset at 20 minutes regardless of how much time was left on the clock when the characters left that level originally.

The tower, however, is left where it was on the lower level.

There are two ways to return to a higher level from a lower level dream.

Dream terminates - If the second dream level terminates while characters are still in it, they are “pushed” up to the first level.

If the third level terminates while characters are in it, those characters are “lost”, and never wake up from the dream world.

A Kick - Characters can be pulled out of any dream level with the use of a *kick* in the next highest level (or the real world). A kick is a shock to the character’s body - falling off a chair, a splash of water, a slap to the face, etc.

If a kick is not arranged before entering the next lower level, someone must be left behind to activate the kick.

If the chemist arranges a chemical kick, they simply make a general roll on their chemistry skill. This kind of kick can be timed exactly, taking place just before a dream level terminates (ie. the clock runs out).

TOWER COLLAPSE

It is possible that the characters will be unable to work the mark without causing so much discord that the tower collapses. When this happens, the current dream level is thrown into chaos. The mark becomes extremely upset and the dream structure grows increasingly disorganized and dangerous.

SPLITTING PARTY LEVELS

We don’t recommend splitting party levels for gameplay reasons, but there will be times when it will be appropriate.

Characters cannot interact with the mark’s subconscious if the mark is not on the same level.

If a character enters a lower level before the mark does, they will be there a relative two years for every additional minute the mark spends in the higher level before joining them.

Players on higher levels make perform 1 action every 10 minutes of clock time with the following caveats -

- 1. The timer does not stop while the higher level character is acting.**
- 2. Discord generated by the character is taken from the same tower the other characters use.**

Until the tower is rebuilt, no further discord pulls are made.

During this turmoil, shades will stop acting as background characters and will identify the team as invaders. They will converge on and attack the team. Events will also begin to take on a sinister tone as they are shaped more by the mark’s subconscious fears.

REPAIRING BROKEN DREAMS

After the tower falls, clear the tower area and set all pieces aside. Create a base of three pieces.

Each round, characters not disabled or occupied can attempt to stabilize the dream by calming the mark or attempting to deal with the symptoms of the collapse. To do this, players provide narrative describing what their character is doing to calm the mark, settle agents, and rebuild the dream. Each detail given adds 1 die to a pool, with a maximum of 5. The player then rolls the pool and may place one piece of the tower on the base for each 5 or 6 rolled.

Once the tower has been completely rebuilt, the mark will calm down, agents and shades will stop attacking the characters, and the dream can resume.

This does not mean that the mark will forget what happened. Clever characters, however, will be able to work the dream breakdown into their narrative for the dream.

If the dream terminates before the tower is rebuilt, all characters, including the mark, are kicked up to the previous dream level. The mark will remain in whatever emotional state they were in when the lower level collapsed, although they will not remember what happened there.

As noted in the Moving Up Levels section, when characters are forced upwards because of a dream termination, the tower is rebuilt completely and 10 pulls are made automatically. The team chooses who makes those pulls.

The majority of LuShu game play will be invented on the fly. There is no pre-planning on the Game Master's part; no maps are required, no pre-generated villains, no stats for magical treasures.

LuShu actually requires very little work on the Game Master's part.

However, that doesn't mean the Game Master is not important to the game.

The following section will give you a few tips and tricks to make LuShu run smoother, as well as a few warnings about things you should be on the look out for.

GAME MASTERING OVERVIEW

As Game Master, you have three jobs during a session:

1. **Organize the handouts before the game begins.**
2. **Compile answers into a cohesive story line.**
3. **Play on behalf of the game "world" as the story unfolds.**

Notice that "tell the story" is not on this list. The story is told by all players.

THE HANDOUTS

The questions you ask and the answers you get set up the party's external conflicts, inter-party internal conflicts, and personal problems.

Each player should get a handout with six different questions. Ask questions that will spark interesting story ideas. Try asking one of each of the following question types -

Personal History - "Why did you stop going to AA?" or "Why did you leave home at 16?" This type of question helps define each character and their personal conflicts.

Professional History - Define the character motivations with questions about previous jobs. "What went wrong in Hong Kong?" or "Why did you leave the agency to work for yourself?"

Team Questions - Establish potential team conflicts with questions about other team members. Be careful to avoid giving players questions about their own roles. "How well do you know the chemist?" or "Why are you working with the architect again after what happened last time?"

Mark Questions - Establish who the mark is and why the job needs to be done by asking questions about the mark. "How do you know the mark's mother?" or "You said you envy the mark, why?"

Dream Questions - Asking about the character views on the dream world is a good way to create conflicts you can use. "Why is your totem a Gumby

figurine?" or "Why do you always include clock towers in your dream designs?"

Random Questions - Give players opportunity to free-associate with a question with no expected answer. Use gender-neutral names and indefinite items. "Why do you have that picture in your wallet?" or "Who is Terry?"

When writing up your questions, keep them open to interpretations as much as possible. Leave room for the

player's imagination.

"Why did you leave AA?" could have many answers - the character could be an alcoholic, or they could be a former counselor. The character could also have gone AWOL from their anti-aircraft battery battalion.

However, "Why did you quit going to your court-ordered AA meetings?" has a very narrow spectrum of meanings.

FROM HANDOUT TO GAME

Once the players have decided on their roles and have filled out the handouts, it's to create the scenario.

Create columns on a sheet of paper - one for each of the characters, then one for the mark. Now put each fact learned into the appropriate column. Assume every answer given is true.

Now go through each column and identify conflicts. Try to find an explanation for why both facts are true. If one handout says the mark is male but another female, consider that the mark may have had a sex change and one of the characters refuses to acknowledge the new gender. It's a stretch, but it works.

If a conflict cannot be resolved, drop one of the conflicting items.

Make general notes on the history of

the characters. Try to limit your notes to events in the character's life, not personality traits.

Now define the mark. Start with the mark's age and social status. Are they rich or poor? Are they a child, teenager, or adult? Now expand your notes to define the other areas of their life, incorporating the handout facts wherever possible.

Once the mark is defined, you need a conflict in the mark's life. The conflict may or may not be directly related to the score, but it will give the characters something to work with in order to make the grab or score.

If none of the facts provide an obvious conflict, you'll need to define the conflict yourself. Start by defining the most important person in the mark's life. Decide what that person does for

a living and how that affects the mark. Now decide their relationship.

Here are a few examples of conflicts -

Mark vs. Relative - The mark is in direct conflict with a sibling, cousin, or other relative. This could be a conflict over family business or holdings or just a personal conflict.

Mark Escaping Relative - The mark wants to escape the shadow of a dominating relative, such as a parent or grandparent.

Mark vs. Antagonist - The mark has a peer who is in direct opposition to them. This is usually set in a business, school, or some other semi-professional setting.

This not, of course, a definitive list but should give you a good starting point.

Now that you've got a conflict, you decide how the characters become involved. Hopefully, the handouts have given you a reason why at least one of the characters is involved in this job. While it's not necessary to create personal involvement, and you can definitely run a game in which the characters are just hired professionals, it does increase player interest in the story if their characters have a stake in the outcome.

If no personal involvement is apparent, consider that the person hiring the team, or the mark themselves, are familiar with one of the team members.

Either the mark's conflict or the mark's personal history should

provide an idea for the score. Start by asking what secrets the mark is privy to. Does the mark have access to their controlling grandfather's estate account numbers? Do they know information about their wife's sensitive government job? Do they have knowledge of a crime that was never brought to justice?

Now make a few notes about anyone who stands to gain by having access to just a small part of those secrets. Of that list, who stands to gain enough that they would actually hire the characters to steal that information?

You should now have a good idea who the mark is, who the characters are, who is hiring the characters, and what they want. Whatever bits of information are left missing can be filled in as the game plays out.

Tell the players what you've learned about who their characters are and how they know each other, then tell them what the mission is and who the employer is.

Do not reveal everything you know about the mark. Start with the information the client provides, then allow the party to discover the rest during stage 2.

And that's it!

Now the game is in the players' hands.

OTHER GAME MASTERING ADVICE

The following are suggestions for new LuShu game masters.

LET THE PLAYERS IMPROVISE

Rely on the group contribution mechanic for story elements. If a player asks a question that you don't have answered in your notes, it's fine to make something up, but it's better to ask the player what they think the answer is.

Some portions of the game require you to think quickly, so save your energy and let the players do the work wherever possible.

WORK THE CLOCK

Letting a section run long is fine the first few times you play, when you are still getting used to the game.

Once you're familiar with the game's flow, however, it's important to keep the game on the clock to keep the story moving and provide a level of tension that simple storytelling can't.

SPARE THE TOWER

It may sound counter-intuitive to avoid using the tower while playing

LuShu, but there are two perfectly good reasons for doing so.

First, LuShu is about roleplaying, not playing Jenga. Character actions and interactions should take center stage in the game. Making tower pulls for every action shifts the focus from game play to mechanics.

Second, the less you ask for discord pulls, especially early on in the game, the less the players will about it. As the game progresses, the clock begins to wind down and tension rises. This makes discord more of threat and stakes seem higher.

PLAY ON CHARACTER ROLES FROM THE START

Explain story elements directly to the point rather than the group. This puts the task of gathering the team on the point and will encourage the players to talk about and flesh out their characters and character histories.

Direct mark behavior to the counterfeiter. Tell the chemist about dream stability issues. When describing shades and attacking agents, direct your info to the heavy.

Keep the player characters in their roles by making the roles they've chose important.

DONT MAKE IT EASY

The party should never walk into the first dream layer, guide the mark to a predetermined spot, and have the mark read out the score.

If the score is too easy, the party won't feel like they've earned it.

Listen to them as they plan out the grab and dream levels, then play up to the fears they have about the plan.

In the first layer, let the team encounter information as filtered by the mark's personality. This information may be blatant, but could be hidden behind other memories. Give the team clues about how the mark's mind is organized and let that challenge their plans.

The second layer will contain information the mark doesn't like to think about, thoughts that scare them. This will make things more turbulent, with information more disjointed.

If the team go into the third layer, information should be acted out by the mark's interactions with projections.

BUT DONT MAKE IT TOO HARD

Don't block the party. Provide story elements that challenge their plans, but to don't work to thwart them. Let the party achieve every victory they've worked for.



SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRES

Point

1. What happened to your political career?
2. Why don't you have a driver's license?
3. What is it about this job that worries you?
4. Why is there such bad blood between you and the mark's father?
5. Tell me about the tiger on your totem.
6. Why is this chemist the only chemist you will work with?

Architect

1. Why didn't you complete college?
2. You've turned down every job offer you've gotten for the last 10 months, why?
3. Why did you say yes to this job?
4. Are you afraid of your childhood friendship with the mark affecting your ability to do your job?
5. Why do wildfires appear so often in your dream designs?
6. Who is Molly?

Chemist

1. How did you lose your pharmacist's license?
2. What happened in Miami two years ago?
3. You know something about the mark that you're afraid to tell the others. What is it?
4. We have a phone recording of you saying you believe the Point might try to kill the mark after the score. Why did you say that?
5. Why don't you enter the second level of dreams when you're on a job?
6. Why do you keep that scarf tucked into the inside pocket of your jacket?

Counterfeiter

1. How are you doing with rehab?
2. You met the mark at art school? Tell us a little about that.
3. Do you think the chemist still holds a grudge over what happened on the last job you two worked together?
4. Why do you think your talents might not be adequate for this particular job?
5. You won't change genders in a

dream. Why is that?

6. Tell us about your missing finger.

Heavy

1. Tell us about your discharge from the military.

2. Do you still feel responsible for what happened to your mother?

3. Are you afraid of what will happen if the point finds out about the deal you made?

4. You were startled when you heard the name of the mark. Why?

5. Why do you change your totem with every job?

6. What happened in Arizon?

Tourist

1. Are you still involved in trading?

2. How have you changed since the train wreck?

3. You pushed to be included on this particular job. Why?

4. You told the point that you'd be in trouble if the mark knew you were involved in this. Why did you say that?

5. The last job you were on, you almost got trapped on the third level of the dream. What went wrong?

6. How did you choose your totem?

Lushu

Character Name

Will

Traits

Abilities

Weakness

Lushu

Character Name

Will

Traits

Abilities

Weakness