

Inner Worlds

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For the RPG Solitaire Challenge.

Challenges Inner Worlds Fits: The Scheherazade Challenge, The Sharing Challenge

Challenges Inner Worlds Somewhat Fits: ARG! RPGS! (Or, the Andy Kaufman Challenge), Pencil and Paper

Inner Worlds is an exploration of a person, juxtaposing the perhaps mundane events of her or his life with the fantastic vision of the places that lie within the heart and mind. Like many games, Inner Worlds has some rules and constraints – creative levers to help you to build far more than you could with just a few blank pages. But unlike many games, Inner Worlds is not so much won by achieving a final goal, but by each step of the game challenging yourself to come up with ideas that fit the moment and will surprise yourself when you come back to from a different direction.

Supplies

All you need to play Inner Worlds is several dozen sheets of paper and whatever you feel comfortable with for writing and drawing. If you want to be more elaborate though you can also use a small blank book and some tape for linking several sheets of paper together into one large sheet. Alternatively, you can use electronic documents or even a single user wiki along side a drawing program if you are so inclined.

Components

As you setup and play Inner Worlds you will be assemble various components, most of which start out very simple but become far more elaborate as you progress through your chosen person's life and inner world.

Journal – Chronological entries of the places and peoples encountered in the inner world.

Map Sheets or one big Map – Drawings of places journeyed through in the inner world.

Direction Legend – Records what it means to journey in a direction, on or off a path, and how it affects your person's life.

Terrain Legend – Graphically records the terrain found in each region of a map and its influence on your person's life.

Site Legend – Constantly expanding list of options for special places and other options that can affect your person's life.

People List – A list of important people to your person, starting with her or himself, and their descriptions.

Internal Conflict List – A list of conflicts your person has within her or himself, where she wants or needs two things and cannot have both.

Personal Conflict List – A list of conflicts your person has with another person, listing the other person, where each of them wants or needs one thing and they both cannot be satisfied.

External Conflict List – A list of conflicts between people other than your person, listing the two other people, where each of them wants or needs one thing and they both cannot be satisfied.

Playing Inner Worlds

First develop your *concept* of who your person will be and what your inner world looks like. Second, *setup* the legends for your map. Now you can start a *play cycle* from any cardinal direction. Keep doing

play cycles, taking breaks as you like, until you go off *the edge of the map* and decide to finish your journey.

Concept

Think of a person whose inner world you want to explore. I suggest keeping her or him fairly ordinary, the extra-ordinary elements will come easily from the inner world. If you are finding it difficult to think of someone, think of some of the people you've encountered in passing recently and make your person a fictionalized version. All you need is a name and a short description which you write as the first entry in your People List.

Then think about your vision of the inner world. What will it look like? A fantasy kingdom, a sky-spanning tree, a giant city, or even a heavily populated galaxy? From here you can pick the number of cardinal directions for your map. Two for a giant tower. Three or four or even more for a vast land or dream city, and six for space where you squish up and down into the plane of the map. You can also start thinking about whether your inner world has more *layers* than the one your map represents. You won't need to make that decision yet, but if you already know one way or another it simplifies things as you go on.

Setup

Setup Direction Legend – list each cardinal direction, using names, arrows, or whatever will make it easiest to remember, leaving room for a meaning and listing “on-path” and “off-path” for each. Leave room underneath the cardinal directions for any layer directions to be paired with meanings as you come up with them. For each cardinal direction “on-path” or “off-path” pair and each layer direction you will have a trio of conflict effects. To leave room for these write down “add /sustain /resolve ” with space between them for you to fill in with one each of “internal”, “personal”, and “external” later.

Setup this Map Page's Terrain Legend – divide the page up into equal sized sections for each cardinal direction. Then label each of those sections for each of the cardinal directions. You may list terrain drawings, names, and the tones the terrain lends a scene as you encounter them, or you may note your ideas beforehand.

Setup Site Legend – this will be an expanding list of options for important places or their lack and the resulting effect of choosing an option on the scene. Each Site Legend starts with the following two special options:

- A new or already listed type of site – choose to add, sustain, or resolve an internal, personal, or external conflict. When you spend this option, add a new list entry, already spent, for this type of site with the specific conflict effect you chose associated with it.
- No site – choose to add, sustain, or resolve an internal, personal, or external conflict. When you spend this option, add a new list entry, already spent, for “no site” with the specific conflict effect you chose associated with it.

Layers

A layer expresses another level to the inner world, which need not follow the same logic and rules as any other layer. By default, the inner world starts in a single layer and you need not add any further layers. But, whenever you add a site to the map you have the opportunity to make that site a gateway site, describing it as one-way link to another layer of the inner world. If your current map location has a gateway site, your next direction for the journey may be in its layer direction, rather than in a cardinal

direction. You may choose a location on the linked layer's map or have the gateway access a different place every time it is used. If you do have a fixed destination, you may also wish to have a return gateway at that same location. In any case note this in your journal.

Each layer has its own map and legends, but the journal is shared. If this is your first time in a given layer, repeat the building a *concept* for this layer and its cardinal directions and *setup* for its legends. Layers need not share cardinal directions, or even number of direction.

Play Cycle

The core of Inner Worlds is the play cycle, a sequence of choices and creative activities which makes up a step in journey of the fantastic inner world paired with a pivotal scene in your person's life. The play cycle is meant to be repeated as many times as you like, explore the inner and outer world of your person, building the maps, legends, and travel journal along the way. When you take a break it works best to pause between play cycles, to leave the question of where to travel next as something to consider until you return.

The play cycle sequence is the following:

1) Choose a Direction – this determines roughly where you will be on the map for this play cycle. Usually you will choose a cardinal direction, but if your last location on the map has one or more gateway sites you can travel in any of those layer directions. If this is your very first play cycle choose any cardinal direction.

If you travel in a direction, to which you have not yet added a meaning, then now you will take a moment and decide the meaning of that direction. For a cardinal direction a broad ideal of the mind or heart is an excellent meaning, as these directions represent gradual changes in your person. Examples include: Reason, Love, Fear, Passion, Ambition, Hatred, Anger, Addiction, Despair, Joy, Understanding.

For layer directions the meaning should be more pointed, these directions occur more rarely and represent the sharp transition from one state of mind to another and often have a more concrete and definite tone to them. Examples include: Surrender, Escape, Psychosis, Revelation, Loss, Acceptance, Failure, Achievement.

2) Determine How the Conflicts Will Be Changed – If you chose a cardinal direction, choose either on-path or off-path, if you are on the path you will draw a path (a road or river) connecting your previous location with the new one, otherwise you won't be connecting such a path. This will also tell you which of the trio of conflict effects (one added, one sustained, and one resolved) you will use. If this triple doesn't exist yet, assign each of the types (internal, personal, and external) once each to one of the conflict effect for this option.

Then spend one option from the Site Legend, even if you are returning to the same location – after all you may find new sites on your return. This may or may not give you a special site at your location, but it will give a fourth effect on the conflicts. If after spending that option, all options on the Site Legend are spent, remove all the spent markings so that any of them can be used again.

3) Add in Scene Elements – Based on the four conflict effects, the direction's meaning, and the nearby labels on the map describe to yourself the crucial people, place or places, and other things you might need for the scene. During this process you can fill in some back story, flesh out description, and invent new characters with relationships to your person or other people in the People List, just be sure to list them in the People List themselves.

4) Handle Terrain – If not returning pick or create a terrain that suits your scene's tone from the Terrain Legend for your region, the section of the map predominantly in that cardinal direction. If you are not sure which region applies, use any region which is close. If you are returning then look up the terrain in this location in the Terrain Legend to find the tone which will influence the scene.

Specific terrain is heavily dependent on the concept for your inner world (and possible the specific layer). A cloud kingdom will have different terrain than a terrestrial continent, as will a heavily populated solar system from a giant city. But the tones are more likely to be consistent. The tone provides an accent to a scene, the last little touch for inspiration and it can really go either way, influencing the inner world or influencing the scene. Examples include: Dangerous, Calm, Friendly, Tense, Raucous, Suspicious, All Falls Apart, Sweet, Bizarre.

5) Describe the Scene, Updating Conflicts and People – Now that you have all the inputs to the scene you are ready to describe the scene, which really pivots around those four conflict effects determined by the Direction Legend and the Site Legend.

When you Add a conflict, you want to describe how, depending on the conflict type, just your person, your person and someone else, or two other people discover that they want or need two things but cannot have both. Use the other conflicts and the descriptions of people that you've written, in addition to the direction's meaning, the terrain's tone, and nearby labels on the map for inspiration. For example, with a direction meaning of Anger your person may realize she cannot hold her grudge against her coworker and keep working in her current position. Another example is based on a nearby label that reminds you about a friendship with your person's brother's fiance you could introduce that your person's brother and sister-in-law cannot keep their marriage running smoothly and stay close friends with your person. It is important that you do not determine the outcome of this conflict at this point, that will happen when you resolve the conflict.

When you Sustain a conflict, pick an existing conflict (not one added in this scene) of the specified type and bring it back up in light of the influences on the scene. Stress the difficulties of the two sides and that something will need to be done. For example, sustaining both of the conflicts above with a tone of Isolation could occur by your person stewing in her office about something her coworker said instead of getting work done when she gets a call from her sister-in-law about something that she really should be talking to her husband about. Remember, again, that it is important not to resolve the conflict while sustaining, that will happen when you resolve the conflict.

When you Resolve a conflict, pick an existing conflict (not one added in this scene) of the specified type and decide which of the two alternatives will win out, or whether neither will happen. Often the direction's meaning can be of great help here if you want to decide. Then describe how that outcome occurs, as simply as you like. Remember a conflict that has produced a great deal of drama may in fact be resolved quite simply. Perhaps the aggravating coworker leaves for another state as you follow the Ambition direction. Or resolution can be a massive deal, such as a big fight between your person, her sister-in-law and her brother leaving each of them angry and bitter toward the other two thanks to the Anger direction.

If you don't have a conflict of a given type ignore any sustaining or resolving of those conflicts. If you have *three* or more conflicts of a type, you *may* ignore introducing a conflict of that type.

6) Update the Map and Journal by

1) Drawing Discoveries on the Map – First draw any site you picked from the Site Legend, and any paths you are continuing, then draw in any other elements you see fit – after all the sites on the Site Legend typically mean major places so for a medieval inner world you could draw a small village or two even if you picked “no site”. If you've never been to this part of the map before sketch out the terrain for the location around the other discoveries. Through this entire process you will be deciding

how large this location is, and in essence how far on the map this step has taken you. There is no hard rule about distance, just give yourself enough room to draw and label everything you want comfortably and then try to keep them roughly the same size from play cycle to play cycle if you can.

II) Writing Labels on the Map – As you are drawing new things on the map add labels to them describing very briefly the names, residents, or important events or objects in these places. When it comes to labeling things you should steal aggressively from the events of the scene. This may seem odd at first, but remember those events are the building blocks of this inner world. As part of this labeling, note if a site is a gateway site, and if so what layer it links to, even if that layer is entirely new.

III) Writing a Brief Journal Entry about these Discoveries, Notable Places, People, and Things - Now that you've labeled the essential elements of the new location, begin writing a new journal entry following your nameless traveler as he encounters these places, peoples, and things and reacts to them. Take this opportunity to flesh them out, to reflect the events of the scene, and even to make commentary on those events.

Edge of the Map

When you travel off the edge of the map choose either to add a new page to the map at that border, starting a new Terrain Legend for that page as in setup, or you can finish your journeys. If you choose to finish your journeys you have one last scene and entry off the map, where you glimpse a thematic destination for that direction. For example, Reason to Pure Thought, Anger to Mindless Rage, Joy to Perfect Pleasure. In that scene you may resolve one additional conflict of each type.