

# Blood *on the* Snow

A DramaSystem Companion  
Edited by Robin D. Laws

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# Table of Contents

<b>From Islands Icy to Tropical, and on Some Continents In Between, Drama Ensues</b> .....	4	<b>Go Big</b> .....	24	<b>System Shock</b> , <i>Steve Darlington</i> .....	53
<b>DramaSystem MasterClass</b> .....	5	<b>Take a Suggestion</b> .....	24	<b>The Chase</b> , <i>Paula Dempsey</i> .....	59
<b>Life During Wartime</b> .....	5	<b>Go to the Crib Sheet</b> .....	25	<b>Gangs of Old York</b> , <i>Jack Norris</i> .....	63
<b>What Does the GM Do?</b> .....	6	<b>DramaSystem LARP Rules</b> .....	28	<b>Andalusian Nights</b> , <i>Ken Burnside</i> .....	67
<b>To Boldly Play ...</b> .....	7	<b>Nordic Freeform (semi-lajv)</b> .....	28	<b>The Green Line</b> , <i>C.A. Suleiman</i> .....	73
<b>Single Session Play Hacks</b> .....	8	<b>How to Play</b> .....	29	<b>Dolphin</b> , <i>C.A. Suleiman</i> .....	77
Predetermined Story.....	9	<b>Advanced Techniques</b> .....	30	<b>To End All Wars</b> , <i>Kevin Allen Jr.</i> .....	81
Stronger GM Control.....	9	<b>DramaSystem LARP Style</b> .....	30	<b>Mutant City: HCIU</b> , <i>Robin D. Laws</i> .....	87
From Single Session		<b>Overview</b> .....	30	<b>Vice and Virtue</b> , <i>Andrew Peregrine</i> .....	91
to Campaign.....	10	<b>What You Need To Play</b> .....	30	<b>The Throne</b> , <i>James L. Sutter</i> .....	97
<b>Investigations and Mysteries</b> .....	10	<b>Role of the GM</b> .....	31	<b>Family Business</b> , <i>Aaron Rosenberg</i> .....	101
<b>Adding Additional Scenes</b> .....	12	<b>Number of GMs</b> .....	31	<b>Rust</b> , <i>Sean Preston</i> .....	105
Bennies in One-Shot Games.....	12	<b>Costumes</b> .....	31	<b>Fire in the Heartland</b> , <i>Greg Stolze</i> .....	111
<b>Choosing a Series Pitch</b> .....	13	<b>Name Tags</b> .....	31	<b>The Spirit Is Willing</b> , <i>Lester Smith</i> .....	115
This above all: to thine		<b>Locations</b> .....	31	<b>The Champion of Florence</b> ,	
own self be true.....	13	<b>Embrace the Drama</b> .....	31	<i>Josh Roby</i> .....	119
Brevity is the soul of wit.....	14	<b>Transparency</b> .....	31	<b>Article Nine</b> , <i>David L. Pulver</i> .....	125
Give every man thy ear,		<b>Character Creation</b>		<b>Against Hali</b> , <i>Robin D. Laws</i> .....	131
but few thy voice.....	14	<b>and Relationships</b> .....	32	<b>Paged</b> , <i>Steve Dempsey</i> .....	135
That it should come to this!.....	14	<b>What to Tell Players</b> .....	32	<b>The Shadow of Napoleon, or:</b>	
<b>DramaSystem as Prequel</b> .....	15	<b>Supporting Characters</b> .....	32	<b>Turku by Lamplight</b> , <i>Mike Pohjola</i> .....	139
<b>Reverse-Engineered</b>		<b>Session Framing</b> .....	33	<b>Transcend</b> , <i>Jennifer Brozek</i> .....	145
<b>DramaSystem</b> .....	16	<b>The Right to Describe</b> .....	33	<b>The Last Kingdom</b> , <i>Jeff Richard</i> .....	149
<b>15 Ways to Spark Scenes</b>		<b>Drama Contests</b> .....	33	<b>Secret of Warlock Mountain</b> ,	
<b>When You're Stumped</b>		<b>Transparency</b>		<i>Wade Rockett</i> .....	155
<b>for a Call</b> .....	17	<b>and Drama Contests</b> .....	33	<b>Alma Mater Magica</b> , <i>Angus Abranson</i> .....	159
<b>Act from Desire</b> .....	18	<b>Ending Drama Contests</b> .....	33	<b>The Road to Appomattox</b> ,	
<b>Act from Feeling</b> .....	19	<b>Procedural Rules</b> .....	34	<i>Jon Creffield</i> .....	165
<b>Play the Theme</b> .....	19	<b>Consequence Cards</b> .....	36	<b>Heroes of the City</b> ,	
<b>Set Up a Pivot</b> .....	20	<b>Success by Narration</b> .....	36	<i>Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan</i> .....	169
<b>Pivot Someone Else</b> .....	20	<b>Player vs. Player</b> .....	36	<b>The Bunker</b> , <i>Ian "Lizard" Harac</i> .....	175
<b>Start with a Pairing</b> .....	21	<b>Building on Outcomes</b> .....	37	<b>Grave New World</b> , <i>Cédric Ferrand</i> .....	179
<b>Check Your Grants</b> .....	21	<b>Wrapping Up</b> .....	37	<b>The Perfect Family</b> ,	
<b>Petition a New Character</b> .....	21	<b>Campaigns</b> .....	37	<i>Mark Diaz Truman</i> .....	185
<b>Invent a New Character</b>		<b>Series Pitches</b>		<b>ENDURE!</b> , <i>Mark Rein•Hagen</i> .....	189
<b>to Petition You</b> .....	22	<b>Blood on the Snow</b> , <i>Pedro Ziviani</i> .....	39	<b>The Dagon Bar</b>	
<b>Get Yourself in Trouble</b> .....	22	<b>Shanghai 1930</b> , <i>John Rogers</i> .....	43	<b>and Grille</b> , <i>John Kovalic</i> .....	195
<b>Get Someone Else in Trouble</b> .....	23	<b>Darke and</b>		<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Get Everyone in Trouble</b> .....	24	<b>Stormy Nights</b> , <i>Scott Bennie</i> .....	49	<b>Advanced Procedural System</b> .....	199
				<b>DramaSystem Character Sheet</b> .....	205
				<b>Scene Prompt Cards</b> .....	207

# From Islands Icy to Tropical, and on Some Continents In Between, Drama Ensues

As the subtitle implies, *Blood on the Snow*: the DramaSystem Companion serves as accompaniment to something else. If you hold this in your hand in a friendly retail location or bustling convention stand but have not yet held *Hillfolk*, go hold that first. *Hillfolk* presents the core rules and recommended starting setting for DramaSystem, the roleplaying game of interpersonal conflict. Built around the same simple structure that powers emotional interplay on stage, on screen, and in the pages of fiction, DramaSystem gives you the framework you need to organically weave a compelling ongoing storyline that deepens week after week. In that book you'll also find an array of alternate settings, which we call *Series Pitches*, from a line-up of luminaries from gaming and beyond, including Ed Greenwood, Kenneth Hite, Jason Morningstar, Jesse Bullington, Chris Lackey, Meg Baker, Wolfgang Baur, and Rob Heinsoo.

*Blood on the Snow* further explores the potential flowing from DramaSystem's basic creative tools.

**DramaSystem MasterClass** dives deep into tips, tricks, and techniques to enrich your game, whether you're playing it straight-up, or using it as a springboard for another roleplaying experience. This section provides inspirational exhortations, reverse engineering anecdotes, and step-by-step methods to unblock stumped scene callers. Join our vanguard of early adopters as they analyze the drama token economy, ponder the paradox of low-pressure GMing, hack the scene calling process, and raid the engine for prequel potential.

As soon as our crowdfunding backers first checked out DramaSystem in draft form, they

saw that it cried out for a live action application. Emily Care Boss brilliantly gets the game off its feet and into the big play space in the **DramaSystem LARP Rules** chapter. She lays out two distinct modes of play, of varying degrees of Nordicism. From the character-making process to the debrief in the pub afterwards, she's got you covered.

Then it's time to once again gorge on the breadth of DramaSystem's applicability with a further cascade of **Series Pitches**. Our international super-team of contributors spans schools and generations of gaming. Showing off the game's flair for the historical, they take you to 10<sup>th</sup> century Iceland, the Spanish Reconquista, 30s Shanghai, and the American Civil War. With robot doctors, transhuman transformations, and genetic hegemony, they exploit DramaSystem's suitability for classic, idea-driven SF. Those looking to get crazy will find improbability-powered mecha, Tsarist steampunk, and a war in heaven. Literary inspiration abounds, from the tearooms of Jane Austen's Bath and a revolution against Robert W. Chambers' *Yellow Sign*, to wizards suffering middle-aged despond as faculty of their magical alma mater.

In other words, *Blood on the Snow* contains more options for play than any one group could ever exhaust. Thank goodness there's a MasterClass entry helping you to pick your next destination for drama, whether you find it in the glossy world of England's equestrian set, the rural grit of a declining town in the American heartland, or a good old fashioned fantasy city chockablock with elves, dwarves, and orcs.

— RDL

# DramaSystem MasterClass

## Life During Wartime

*Chris Huth*

The blurb on the back of this book probably tells you that DramaSystem is a groundbreaking new step forward in roleplaying games, tearing away the wall of combat-centric thinking to create a new kind of collaborative exercise to bring about a cohesive, shared narrative experience, wherein everyone plays people who grow to examine their relationships together.

### Lies!

The DramaSystem is a brutal, no-holds-barred, take-no-quarter, player-versus-player deathmatch. Your characters face betrayal, inhuman treatment, and a host of fates worse than death on their way to the top. Instead of representing another step in divesting roleplaying games of their wargaming roots, DramaSystem is an apotheosis of roleplaying's wargaming soul into a game which is nothing but war.

Don't believe me? Then you haven't played yet. But soon, you'll need to recognize the tools you're using to fight.

**Your face is a loaded gun.** Don't get trapped thinking that the character you play is your weaponry. The character doesn't exist; what the other players think of your character exists. How other players feel they are forced to choose in response to what they interpret as happening is the bullet. The words (and often, body language) you choose to lead them to that point is the gun. You are your only weapon, so know it well.

**Swing for the jugular.** Don't get trapped thinking that the battlefield consists of a bunch of physical obstacles co-imagined. Instead, the solid foundations of the game world are what people care about, what they notice, and what they put effort into establishing. Watch how they improvise, learn to anticipate their moves creating new elements of the world, and where the lacunae in their creations are. Their unvoiced, unconscious assumptions are where you must take your fight. Nothing is certain, everything is liquid.

**Fight dirty.** Through what are you enacting conflict? Recontextualize the other players' interpretations of elements of the game. These elements—characters, possessions, places, social labels, and the emotions attached to them—are created through three means. First, deliberate creation, wherein you describe an element of a world directly. Second is reflexive creation, wherein a description of another element implies the context for that thing. Finally, intersectional creation, wherein two or more previously described elements connect or conflict in an obvious way, results in a third element emerging.

The first method is the easiest to see and block. The second and third are where the opportunities are: it is easier to attack an element by recontextualizing it. It is easier to defend by recontextualizing the attack. Chaos is your friend. Since focus is the only way of staying afloat in the liquid battlefield, instigation of broader potential change—more places



for unspoken, unestablished assumptions to reside—gives you more potential freedom of movement. A rising tsunami flips all boats.

**Think with authority; question yourself.**

Think of your player poles as Cynicism vs. True Believer. Identify where your beliefs or desires emerge from your own expectations about how things work, in real life or in stories. Then, look at where your expectations arise from beliefs or desires. See acting on one or another as a choice, the same as it is for a player describing their character.

**Losing doesn't mean dying,** living doesn't mean winning. If everything sucks, that probably just means you or the GM are doing their job. Here's the biggest difference between DramaSystem and other games: your standards of measurement of success are also part of the fluid battlefield. Your character works toward their goals. You do not work toward your character's goals. In fact, you should keep even the meaning of your character's goals in abeyance, both to keep other players in suspense while depriving them of the ability to recontextualize them. Never be fooled, by yourself or someone else, into thinking you're winning.

## What Does the GM Do?

*Nick Wedig*

About halfway through the first time I GMed DramaSystem, a player looked over at me with a strange look and asked “Do you do anything in this game?”

The fact was that I had not really done anything as GM once the gameplay had begun.

Partly, this was because GMing DramaSystem is extremely easy; most of the conflict is between the PCs, so you can have a fun game session without a GM having to do very much. But a big chunk of it was that I had internalized the wrong lesson from the game text. I had been mistakenly focused solely on the drama token economy. In the meantime, I had neglected other ways that I could highlight the game's themes.

The Hillfolk text rightly focuses on the drama token economy, but that isn't the entirety of the game, nor of the Game Moderator's job. Even if you aren't petitioning or granting, you still have important jobs to do as GM, and a host of tools at your disposal.

The GM's main tasks in DramaSystem are to keep the PCs' dramatic decisions interesting and to pay attention to the bigger picture. While the players are looking out for their PCs, you tie the scene into the larger thematic situation.

Recurring characters are one of the GM's best tools for this job, but they are far from the only one. Minor characters can bring a concern to the forefront even without petitioning or granting. All of the GM techniques useful in other RPGs can be repurposed here to highlight the game's interpersonal drama. Describing the environment where action occurs, asking leading questions, introducing external threats, and many other standard techniques can be useful in bringing forward the dramatic poles of the PCs.

For example, in one game a cowardly diplomat, Fivetongues, wanted respect from the crazed warrior priest, Chosen. Before going into a dangerous battle, Fivetongues went to Chosen's temple of the battle god to seek assurances. The group had established Chosen's temple previously, but no scenes had been set there yet. This seemed like a good time for me as Game Moderator to use the environment to reinforce the dramatic situation. I could have