

TRASH MEETS STEEL

presents

Yggdrasil

An entry for "Shortest Month, Longest Game" game design challenge, February 2013

What is *Yggdrasill*

Yggdrasill is a roleplaying game that gives you the chance to create a *world* with your gaming group, and to evolve the history of this *world* session after session, virtually for years of play.

A *world* is a place where your stories will be partially or entirely set.

You'll create stories set in this world with other roleplaying games you possess; *Yggdrasill* is a meta-game that intervenes to chain all those game experiences and to manage the evolution of the *world* game after game.

How these rules are written

When I'll use game terms (*Yggdrasill*, *flash*, *continuum*...) I'll write them in italic. If I write *Yggdrasill* normally (not in italic, then), I mean the in-game tree (or whatever there is at its place), otherwise it's the name of the game.

I'll use the bold in the chapters' names.

The very important stuff is written in red.

Compatibility

Not all the games are compatible with *Yggdrasill*. To be so, a game must:

- be completable in a limited amount of game sessions;
- have a generic or modifiable setting (so that it can stick to your *world*), or a fix setting similar to your *world's* one (you'll create your world in your first game session);
- not be a map-drawing game (*A Thousand Years Under the Sun*, *The Quiet Year*, *La Città Perfetta*...), just to avoid having a matrioska-effect where you must draw many maps one inside the other;
- not be *Yggdrasill* (there's no way you could manage a recursive situation like that).

First session

To start playing *Yggdrasill*, just choose a game and find the people to play it.

When you meet for playing, BEFORE starting the game you chose, you'll have to create the *world*, by following these steps:

1- Discuss with the other players about the games you want to play and about the general aspect of the world you want to create. A *world* is a region, well localized in time and space. If

you decide that your world is a post-apocalyptic steppe, it is not meant that there aren't other places in that planet; a *world* is just a place of interest, a privileged access point to the place where you'll set the stories that you are going to create, a curiously important location that will recur in every game you play. A *world* can be of various dimensions, but I'd avoid to create something smaller than a city, or something bigger than a nation.

2- Choose a name for your *world*. You can choose whatever name you prefer.

3- Go on <http://www.twitter.com>.

4- Create an account whose name is your world's one.

5- Once you are logged with your world's account, let me know you need to be added to the *Yggdrasill's* gaming list by tweeting me ([@il_mietitore](#)) or by clicking on [this link](#) and tweeting that stuff to me. This is necessary so that you can contribute to the *Yggdrasill's* multiverse. DO NOT send the tweet to @Yggdrasill_RPG, since that's not the account I use to manage that list.

6- Subscribe to the [Yggdrasill's list](#). This way, tweets from all the other *worlds* will appear in your stream. You don't have to wait for me to add you to the list: the list is public and you can already subscribe to it, so you can read its contents.

From now on, the *Yggdrasill's* list's stream will be called *continuum*, and the tweets will be called *flashes*.

A *flash* is a small piece of a *world*. It may be an event, a thought, a feeling, a sensation, or anything else that has been strong enough to imbue the *world* itself.

All the worlds in the multiverse are sustained by Yggdrasill, and his roots permeate all of them. Through him, *flashes* from a *world* can reach other *worlds*, and affect the events of these.

THE FOOL RULE

Twitter's lists work like this: if you are part of one, every post you write appears on that list. You can't avoid a tweet by yours to appear there. And if someone is subscribing that list, all of your tweets will appear in his stream.

This list is reserved and dedicated to this roleplaying game. This implies it must remain clean from stuff not related to *Yggdrasill's* gameplay.

The **Fool rule** it's the fundamental rule to keep that list clean and coherent with his finality.

It establishes that **you can only use your *world's* account to tweet *flashes*; whoever is discovered fooling around with his *world's* account, posting stuff different from *flashes*, will be expelled from the list. This will make every tweet sent by him vanish from the list's stream, and all of his contributions to the *continuum* will be forgotten.**

7- Pic a big blank sheet (an A3 sheet can do the work), and draw a tree in the middle of it. It can be a giant sequoia-like tree, a small sprout, or also a symbolic element (like a Christmas tree, an obelisk made of ivory, or a building clearly different from the others). Consider that you'll draw a map of your *world* on this sheet, so you'll want to draw with proper proportions and dimensions. The tree must be clearly distinguishable from the rest of the landscape that you are going to draw. That's Yggdrasill, or at least a leaf of it, spawning in the middle of your world. That's an acknowledged element in your world: no one of the local inhabitants suspects it to be a leaf of a divine tree that holds together all the worlds in the universe, but everyone knows its presence and doesn't care too much about it. For what they care, that's just a curious element in their landscape.

8- Collectively draw something on the map, around the leaf of Yggdrasill, accordingly to what emerged from your discussion before. If you decided your *world* to be a city, you should add some buildings and structures, and maybe some road. If you decided it to be a mountain, draw the borders of the mountain, a forest, and... well, you decide what else to draw. You can be as detailed as you prefer.

9- Each of you must then browse the *continuum* and choose a *flash*. You can take a *flash* as old as you prefer, but every one of you will have to take a different *flash*. When one of you chooses a *flash*, mark it as a favorite on Twitter, then copy-paste it and tweet it again (without quoting the author); the player who chose it draws something on the map inspired by it.

Now the *world* is ready to be played with.

At this point, you start playing with the game you chose.

FEVER MODE

Currently, the *Yggdrasill*'s list is basically empty. To kickstart the game, we'll need a lot of tweets in it.

So, until the 31st of March **Yggdrasill is on fever mode**. This implies that until that day everyone will have the possibility to send personal tweets to *Yggdrasill*'s account, and as soon as those tweets fulfill the *flash* submission guidelines (see page 5 for details) they will be tweeted by me, with *Yggdrasill*'s account.

Send your tweets to [@Yggdrasill RPG](#) or use [this form](#) to do so.

You use your real twitter account to send tweets for the fever mode. This implies that you can take advantage of it even if you currently don't have an actual group to play *Yggdrasill* with.

Setting a game in your world

When you play a game while using *Yggdrasill*, nothing changes in it, except that you must set partially or entirely your gameplay in the *world* you created.

For example, if you play *Dungeon World* this location will have to arise. If you play *In A Wicked Age*, interpret the oracles so that you can set your story here. If you play *Fiasco*, choose a playbook that lets you the possibility to set your story in your *world*. And so on.

While you play a game inside *Yggdrasill*, apart from having to set your game partially or entirely in your *world*, you don't have other limitations. *Yggdrasill* must remain a figure in the background, observing what's happening; it's just a part of the landscape, and you can interact with it in the same way you interact with normal environment in the game you chose to play.

It can also be destroyed. Never mind.

After-game

Play your game normally until you end it.

When this happens, do this:

1- Pick an index card, and write the names of the players who participated in this game. Then, put two Xs near their names. Erase one X from the names of the players who didn't participate in this game. If a name doesn't have any more Xs, erase it.

2- Every player must write a *flash*, and publish it on Twitter with your *world's* account. A flash is a thought, a comment, an I-don't-know-what about what you played in the last game. In other terms, it must be an in-game tweet. It can be a character's thought:

"Still guessing where those railways led"

"So much people in here. This is a real concert, finally."

"Now my brother too. I'm the only one who still is fighting this war, it appears."

"Fhtagn"

or a sort of photograph:

A never-ending railway.

The smell of hundreds of people gathering for an unforgettable event.

A fratricidal war.

A temple not crafted by human hands, rising in the middle of the sea.

Don't sign your *flash*.

If I didn't yet add you to the Yggdrasill's list on Twitter, your tweet may not appear in the list's stream. So please don't tweet your *flashes* yet, but stack them somewhere (write them down on a note pad, for instance) and wait for me to do add you. Then, publish all the *flashes* you stacked. I waste my life on the internet, so I'll have the possibility to read your requests and add you in the list mostly every day. Unless you don't play a one-shot game (like *Fiasco*, *Geiger Counter* or *Hell for Leather*), you shouldn't meet this trouble.

3- Update your map, by erasing what has been destroyed and correcting what has changed since the last time you draw it.

4- If Yggdrasill has been destroyed, he'll spawn again, slowly, in the same place. Draw a leaf (or the equivalent, according to what your Yggdrasill looks like) where Yggdrasill was standing before. Otherwise, add something to him (a branch, for instance). He'll slowly and progressively grow from session to session.

New game

When you start a new game in your *world*, do what follows:

1- Check the present players with the index card. At least the half (round down) of the present players must have their names already on the list. If it isn't like that, you can't play in this *world* with this gaming group.

2- Browse the *continuum*. Every player must choose a different *flash* that haven't been chose before (use your favorites list to check them, eventually) and that haven't been submitted by you. As the first time, mark as favorite the *flashes* you choose, and every player draws on the map something inspired by the *flash* he chose. You can also modify already existing elements of the environment, but you can't modify Yggdrasill.

A little time passed since the last story you told (you decide how much), so it's credible that new elements of the environment have spawned. If you wish to do big jumps forward in time, consider the possibility to make a new *world*.

From here, proceed like explained in the "Setting a game in your *world*" chapter.

Design notes

This isn't (hopefully) the final version of the rules. I'm still looking for a better way to write all of this, since I'm not convinced by the way I did it. Probably I'm going to create an homepage and use that as an handbook.

In the coming version I'd like to introduce some guidelines, inspired by *A Penny for my Thoughts*, about how to write better *flashes*. Plus, I think that examples may be a lot useful, so I'll probably add some.

The ingredients I used for this game are "Tree", "Fever", and "Fool". "Tree" became the main symbolic element of the game, obviously incarnating in Yggdrasill, the tree that in the Norse cosmology holds the nine worlds. "Fool" just gave the name to the fool rule, but in fact suggested me to specify that common sense rule. "Fever" suggested me the fever mode.

I intend to take part in these challenges:

No Advancement Challenge: it's a game about the proceeding of facts and events in a continuum, not about the characters' progression. In fact, there aren't fixed and stationary characters at all.

Indie Extrapolation Challenge: The whole game is a way to lengthen the game experience resulting from shorter games. Plus, I see this game as a not-so-deep hack of *A Thousand Years Under the Sun*, and I extrapolated some mechanics from *In A Wicked Age* (the *flashes* are an evolution of the oracles, while the Index Card mechanic is inspired by the Owe List). There's a lot more of other games in here than stuff that I actually created.

Pure Innovation Challenge: The use of Twitter comes from *Superbrothers: Sword & Sorcery EP*, which is a videogame. In roleplaying games, Twitter has never been seen before, for as much as I know, and I think the use of internet may be an interesting direction in which to direct the coming game design in the near future.

CREDITS

Yggdrasill has been created and written by Alex “il mietitore” Isabelle.

Inspiration comes from *A Thousand Years Under the Sun* by Matthijs Holter and from *In A Wicked Age* by D. Vincent Baker.

The use of Twitter has been suggested by the videogame *Superbrothers: Sword & Sorcery EP*.

The main theme of the game, the recursion of elements between different worlds/dimensions/timelines, has been suggested by the reading of *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell.

Thanks to Francesco “Ruggerfred” Sedda, Marco Iotti and Davide Falzani, who read these rules “in extremis” and told me they were well written. Now let’s see if they were right.

I mentioned different games in these rules:

A Penny for my Thoughts, Paul Tevis, 2010, Evil Hat Productions

A Thousand Years Under the Sun, Matthijs Holter, 2012

Dungeon World, Sage Latorra & Adam Koebel, 2011, Sage Kobold Productions

Fiasco, Jason Morningstar, 2009, Bully Pulpit Games

Geiger Counter, Jonathan Walthon, 2009, Bleeding Play

Hell for Leather, Sebastian Hickey, 2011, Cobweb Games

In A Wicked Age, D. Vincent Baker, 2008, Lumpley Games

La Città Perfetta, Marco Iotti, 2012, Elementi Finiti

The Quiet Year, Joe McDaldno, 2012, Buried Without Ceremony